EDGWORK AND MIXED MARTIAL ARTS: RISK, REFLEXIVITY AND COLLABORATION IN AN OSTENSIBLY ‘VIOLENT’ SPORT
ALEX CHANNON

THE 52 HAND BLOCKS, SEXUAL DOMINANCE, AND MOTHER DEAR AS ARCHETYPE
THOMAS A. GREEN

JOSÉ CAIRUS

VARIATION IN CULTURAL CONSENSUS BETWEEN EXPERT AND NOVICE IN BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU ATHLETES
KARL BENNETT AND WILLIAM W. DRESSLER

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RANK AND INSTRUCTOR TEACHING TECHNIQUE IN AN ADULT MARTIAL ARTS SETTING
ERIK H. HOFMEISTER, BRYAN A. MCCULLICK, PHILIP D. TOMPOROWSKI, AND PAUL G. SCHEMPP

NAVIGATING THE ROCKY ROAD: ELITE FEMALE BOXERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR BOXING JOURNEY
SHAKIBA OFTADEH-MOGHADAM, CATHERINE PHIPPS, RICHARD THELWELL AND NEIL WESTON

COLLECTING MARTIAL ART KNOWLEDGE ON PAPER IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY: THE EXAMPLE OF PAULUS HECTOR MAIR AND ITS READING IN THE 21ST CENTURY
DANIEL JAQUET

MANUFACTURING MARTIAL SPIRIT: ETHOS, IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY IN THE CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS
DOUGLAS WILE
ABOUT THE JOURNAL

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>Paul Bowman and Benajmin N. Judkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Edgework and Mixed Martial Arts</td>
<td>Alex Channon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk, Reflexivity and Collaboration in an Ostensibly 'Violent' Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The 52 Hand Blocks, Sexual Dominance, and Mother Dear as Archetype</td>
<td>Thomas A. Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Nationalism, Immigration and Identity</td>
<td>José Cairus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Gracies and the Making of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, 1934–1943</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Variation in Cultural Consensus Between Expert and Novice in</td>
<td>Karl Bennett and William W. Dressler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Athletes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Relationship between Rank and Instructor Teaching Technique in an</td>
<td>Erik H. Hofmeister, Bryan A. McCullick, Philip D. Tomporowski,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult Martial Arts Setting</td>
<td>and Paul G. Schempp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Navigating the Rocky Road</td>
<td>Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam, Catherine Phipps, Richard Thelwell, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elite Female Boxers' Perceptions of Their Boxing Journey</td>
<td>Neil Weston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Collecting martial art knowledge on paper in Early Modern Germany</td>
<td>Daniel Jaquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The example of Paulus Hector Mair and its reading in the 21st century</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Manufacturing Martial Spirit</td>
<td>Douglas Wile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethos, Ideology and Identity in the Chinese Martial Arts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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At the time of writing, as we make the final preparations to publish issue 9 of *Martial Arts Studies* in Spring 2020, the world's media, health organisations and governments are telling us that we are standing on the brink of a global pandemic of the coronavirus, COVID-19. We do not yet know how this will play out. Yet we can learn a lot from the media messages we have been given, that are ostensibly about this new virus, but that are also about many other things. These narratives centre on far older concerns, and they have consequences.

One narrative has a very familiar shape. The origin of this new enemy was in the East, in China. From there it began to spread, like a new ‘yellow peril’ – marching, moving, contaminating, growing in force inexorably and yet invisibly – like the sinister, Chinese-led, anti-Western crime network depicted in Sax Rohmer’s imperialistic British *Fu-Manchu* novels of the early twentieth century. Certain individuals, including the United States Senator Tom Cotton, have even wondered whether we are witnessing the escape of a Chinese biological weapon. Luckily such openly conspiratorial accusations have, so far, been rare.

Uncannily like Fu Manchu’s evil network, the destructive force of the coronavirus is actually enabled by the global system it threatens, as it is unwittingly smuggled along with and profits from the hypermobility of business travellers, tourists and other cosmopolitan citizens. In being spread by the globalised network of advanced capitalism, the invisible yet still somehow ‘yellow’ peril strikes at world markets, causing not only illness and increased mortality, but also economic crisis and potential state lockdowns of unknown duration.

In response, we have seen many disturbing things. Firstly, a rise in racism. China itself has been blamed. The Chinese treatment of animals has resurfaced as a familiar theme. ‘Hence’, there has been a rise in anti-Chinese and anti-Asian abuse, with increased racist physical attacks reported in many cities in diverse countries.

At the same time, subtle kinds of nationalist reinvention are capitalizing on the situation. In the face of fears of hand-to-hand transmission, different countries have proposed alternative forms of greeting to the (Western) handshake. China has urged its citizens to use the fist-in-
palm gong shou gesture long associated with traditional Chinese martial arts. Many countries – including South Korea, the home of taekkyeon and taekwondo – are encouraging people to tap feet together.

All of which raises important questions for those interested in the globalization and social function of the East Asian (and particularly Chinese) martial arts, not least because an examination of media stories suggests that the actual practice of these systems has been drawn into all of this. Quarantines, public space/event closures and travel restrictions have taken a toll on all sorts of organizations and classes. At the same time, global citizens have been treated to the sight of gowned and masked nurses leading isolated hospital patients through taijiquan training sessions in an attempt to maintain a healthy level of activity and boost immune systems.

Other news outlets have broadcast features across China suggesting that martial arts practice is an ideal form of exercise for small indoor spaces. The unspoken implications of this lie heavy in the air. Not only can the martial arts be pressed into service as a type of national health regime in times of crises, but they can also serve as a means to deal with the anxieties that COVID-19 – and the media messages about it – spread. Managing a society-wide sense of uncertainty transmitted by so many means is, on some level, a critical aspect of managing the disease itself. Perhaps it is understandable that in times of globalized risks we see a social and political pressure for closures of all kinds: of borders, movement, public spaces, and forms of sociality. Yet a knee-jerk response like this is surely an incorrect one. Turning inward deprives us of the insights, cooperation and resources needed to tackle a global crisis.

As China strives to deal with the continuing social fallout of the crisis, we will almost certainly see more government sponsored features on martial arts, food and other aspects of traditional culture that are generally popular with global audiences. Rather than dismissing such efforts as ‘mere propaganda’, we ought to remember that the martial arts have often functioned as a pathway for the establishment of communities of common interest between East and West. While it is easy to pick apart the sorts of cultural or historical myths that have gone along with this, the relationships of trust and reciprocity that they have created, both within states and between them, are very real. It might be too much to suggest that these sorts of practices function as a vaccine against the fears and biases that emerge in the wake of a crisis, but such institutions are nevertheless central to the recovery that inevitably comes. This was true in the 1950s, it was true in the 1970s, and it will likely also be true today.

But even within global processes, we each retain agency in the face of events and discourses, in terms of our choices. A racist will always find grounds to be racist, just as a nationalist will always find grounds to be nationalist. Choosing to bow, bump elbows or tap shoes together may mean little other than the compulsion to ritualise social interactions by any means available. But while the meanings of some conventions may be empty, open or variable, certain others may be almost impossible to dissociate from established ideological connotations – just think of the connotations attached to snapping to attention and clicking the heels together, for instance.
What all of this throws into relief in so many ways is the complex global interconnectedness of our lives – of the major in the minor and the minor in the major, the trivial in the serious and the serious in the trivial, and one part of the world in all of the others. Just as martial arts are always imbricated within complex discourses and formations, martial arts studies is nothing if not a laboratory for exploring what our practices reveal about the interconnectedness of global society.

**Coverage**

Issue 9 of *Martial Art Studies* demonstrates the disciplinary breadth and heterogeneity of the field itself, in the form a range of articles employing diverse methodological and theoretical approaches. Alex Channon (University of Brighton) opens the issue by asking why people engage in seemingly violent activities such as modern combat sports with those whom they simultaneously claim to respect and admire. To address these issues, he turns to Stephen Lyng’s concept of ‘edgework’ and seeks to interrogate and problematize the concept of violence within sports like the mixed martial arts. In addition to addressing core issues regarding an important phenomenon in popular culture, the theoretical concepts raised in this article will be interesting to researchers in many areas of martial arts studies.

In ‘The 52 Hand Blocks, Sexual Dominance, and Mother Dear as Archetype’ Thomas A. Green (Texas A&M University) stages an investigation of folklore in a predominantly African American martial art which arose within the US prison system during the second half of the twentieth century. His exploration of various origin stories (often focusing on motifs of sexual violence and dominance) opens the way for an exploration of the psychological and social function of the anti-hero in broader African American oral traditions.

Continuing the theme of New World martial arts, José Cairus (University of Santa Catarina) presents a detailed study of the role of nationalism, class-conflict and immigration in the Gracies’ creation of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). This study follows the fortunes of three brothers from the middle years of the 1930s–1940s. Cairus argues that Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu is the direct outcome of clashes pitting the Gracies against Japanese immigrants, all of which occurred against a background of the radical nationalism, violence and ideological polarization accompanying the rise of the Estado Novo dictatorship.

Karl Bennett and William W. Dressler (both of the University of Alabama) continue the discussion of BJJ with a paper titled ‘Variation in Cultural Consensus Between Expert and Novice in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Athletes’. By employing diverse methodological tools, they conclude that the performance and strategic choices of novice athletes on the mat is guided by shared understandings of positional dominance, which are then drilled to the point of embodied reflexivity. High belt-ranked expert athletes, on the other hand, find that relying exclusively on this cultural model of strategy impedes their performance in competition. These individuals are forced to develop personal strategies and fluidity within the context of a cultural model that can be adapted to specific opponents and circumstances.
Pedagogical and technical issues are also central to the article presented by E. H. Hofmeister (Auburn University), B. A. McCullick, P. D. Tomporowski, and P. G. Schempp (all of the University of Georgia). They begin by noting that within the traditional martial arts instructors typically acquire their teaching skills through an informal apprenticeship process. Contending that this leads to poor pedagogical techniques, they then attempt to measure improvements in teaching outcomes as instructors advance through the ranks from first to fifth degree black belts. In general, they find that there is a positive correlation between instructors’ rank and their teaching ability.

In ‘Navigating the Rocky Road: Elite Female Boxers’ Perceptions of Their Boxing Journey’, Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam (University of Portsmouth), Catherine Phipps (Solent University), Richard Thelwell and Neil Weston (both of the University of Portsmouth) provide the field with a much needed bottom-up examination of the life experiences of female boxers. They also provide specific policy recommendations to facilitate greater developmental opportunities. These include the provision of a women’s boxing programme at the elite level and an increase in media promotion of women’s boxing, which may help governing bodies nurture their female amateur boxers. However, they caution that more research is needed examining those who support these athletes (e.g. coaches, parents and sport science/medicine practitioners) to provide a truly holistic evaluation of female boxers’ lived experiences and to understand how best to support them throughout their careers.

All who are interested in the development of Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA) will be pleased to note that the next paper, authored by Daniel Jaquet (University of Bern), provides a comparative exploration of the important texts produced by the Early Modern German fencing enthusiast Paulus Hector Mair. Jaquet’s essential project is to sweep away the notion of Japan and China as the exclusive cradle of globalized martial culture through a review of the interest in European fight books in Asia. His article echoes the recent interest in comparative studies on fight books stemming from Asia, Europe and the Americas, but also points out potential sources of bias.

Douglas Wile (City University of New York) concludes this issue with a thought-provoking and wide-ranging essay titled ‘The Martial Spirit: Ethos, Ideology, and Identity in the Chinese Martial Arts’. Although written before the emergence of COVID-19, some of the points raised in Wile’s important article bear upon the issues that opened our editorial. For instance, Wile notes that our current notions of ‘Martial spirit’ (shangwu jingshen) first emerged as a discursive trope during the late nineteenth century, as China faced the existential threat of internal rebellion, Western and Japanese imperialism and a moribund Manchu dynasty, during which time China’s self-image as the ‘Central Kingdom’ gave way to the international reputation as the ‘Sick Man of Asia’.

Wile sets out the terms of an ever-evolving cultural debate which has been reconstructed and re-imagined over time, until the present conjuncture in which we see expansionist policies on the one hand and separatist movements on the other, and a former ideological belligerence replaced by trade wars and arms races. He argues that, seeing the West as a declining civilization, China flexes its muscle, even amidst persistent fears about going soft. The martial arts themselves have been deeply implicated in each stage of this process.
CONCLUSION

The contents of this issue make it clear that the ebbs and flows of globalization have had a profound impact on the martial arts. Moreover, these exchanges have never been simple and unidirectional. Coming to terms with the social implications of this requires a commitment to interdisciplinary research that fully embraces the values of methodological and conceptual diversity. Indeed, the strength of this issue reminds us that openness and free exchange continues to be our best strategy for facing the threats that challenge our deeply interconnected world.

CODA

*Martial Arts Studies*, issue 7 (Winter 2018), published the article, ‘The Creation of Wing Tsun: A German Case Study’, by S. Körner, M.S Staller, and B. N. Judkins. On 16 July 2019, the editors received the following note from Master Kernspecht with regard to that article. He wrote:

While I enjoyed the recent case study of the development of Wing Chun and the EWTO in Germany by Körner, Staller and Judkins (published in Issue 7 of *Martial Arts Studies*), I feel strongly compelled to offer my own clarification on one critical point. It is not true that I switched loyalty from Sifu Joseph Cheng to Sifu Leung Ting in 1976 as reported by the authors. Rather, it was Sifu Cheng who approached me and said:

‘I cannot teach you anymore. I would like you to continue your studies with the best student of Yip Man in Hong Kong, with Leung Ting Sifu’

This was exactly what our Chinese translator said. Of course, it was a kind of polite excuse as perhaps Sifu Cheng believed he should no longer teach a non-Chinese student. I was always the only Caucasian in class. Indeed, I had to persuade him every day anew by bringing him a big bottle of Johnny Walker Whisky. To which he always said: ‘Ok, but only today!’

The authors and editors thank Master Kernspecht for this clarification.
In this paper I outline the ways in which Stephen Lyng’s concept of ‘edgework’ offers a valuable and unique vantage point for making sense of the contemporary practice of full-contact combat sports. With a specific focus on the sport of mixed martial arts (MMA), I propose that theorising this form of fighting as an example of edgework helps clarify the experiences and motivations of its participants within a social-psychological framework that is well-attuned to the extant research literature. In illustrating its potential utility, I focus on how the concept provides a means of addressing the paradoxical problem of ‘violence’ in MMA; that is, in understanding how and why people might engage in ostensibly ‘violent’ activities with those whom they simultaneously claim to respect and admire. I contend that edgework adds depth to our understanding in this domain by illuminating the nature of the relationship existing between competitive opponents in full-contact fighting, arguing ultimately that it can be used to reconceptualise the action of MMA as a form of mutually constructed risk, instead of ‘violence’. Central to this discussion is the importance of collaboration between competitive opponents in MMA, whose purposeful attempts to beat one another are necessary in order to sustain the activity’s appeal in offering opportunities to experience ‘authentic’ reflexivity, identity construction, and community formation.
INTRODUCTION

In this paper I advocate the use of Stephen Lyng’s concept of ‘edgework’ as a valuable addition to the theoretical toolkit of martial arts studies scholars. Adapted from its initial use by the journalist Hunter S. Thomson, Lyng [1990] developed the concept as a device for explaining voluntary participation in high-risk endeavours, such as ‘extreme’ sports, excessive drug use, and criminal behaviour. The first academic articulation of the concept, in Lyng and Snow [1986], discussed the sport of skydiving; it has subsequently been employed in studies of a diverse range of ‘extreme’ sporting pursuits, ranging from BASE jumping [Laurendeau 2011] to bodybuilding [Worthen and Baker 2016], as well as a host of other, non-sporting activities, including sadomasochism [Newmahr 2011], stock trading [Zwick 2006], and role-playing games [Shay 2017].

Despite a broad uptake in the field of sport sociology, the concept has yet to be fully articulated with respect to martial arts or combat sports. A cursory literature search reveals a small number of instances where Lyng’s theory is briefly name-checked, often discussed fleetingly as a peripheral idea in support of authors’ main theses, or within the footnotes of works concerning combat sports, risk, and related phenomena [e.g., Brent and Kraska 2013: 371; Chisholm et al. 2018: 281; Spencer 2012: 81]. Meanwhile, in more conceptually-focused publications, martial arts are sometimes named in lists of activities to which the concept might apply [see Lyng 2018 for the most expansive example to date]. At the time of writing, a comprehensive application of the theory has yet to be attempted. As such, in this paper I spell out how the idea can offer fresh perspective in the field of martial arts studies by way of a specific discussion of competitive mixed martial arts (MMA).

To begin with, I detail the specifics of edgework as formulated by Lyng [1990; 2004; 2014], showing how this notion neatly describes many of the characteristics of the sport of MMA. I illustrate the application of this concept by using a number of examples from the existing research literature, as well as data from one of my own current empirical studies concerning this sport. Specifically, I articulate the importance of collaboration in this form of edgework [see Newmahr 2011], utilising this notion to further advance the proposition that MMA is not, as some would have it, an inherently ‘violent’ or morally problematic activity. I thus propose that edgework illuminates the lived experience of MMA in a manner that helps explain the difference between sport-based fighting and violence [Channon and Matthews 2018; Matthews and Channon 2017], principally through a close examination of the interactional dynamics of MMA fights and the orientation to the other that such interactions involve.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EDDGWORK AND THEIR APPLICATION TO MMA

BOUNDARIES, RISK AND EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

The fundamental aim of the edgework concept is to explain voluntary risk-taking behaviour, where participants contend with ‘a clearly observable threat to one’s physical or mental well-being or one’s sense of an ordered existence’ [Lyng 1990: 857]. From the outset, it is crucial to stress that edgework is not simply a synonym for taking extreme risks, but specifically refers to situations where clear, high-stakes boundaries – e.g. between life/death, sanity/insanity, functionality/disability – are voluntarily negotiated for their own sake. That is to say, participants in edgework practices seek out experiences that bring them as close as possible to a perceived, existential boundary, which threatens the integrity of the physical, mental, or social self. Exploring such boundaries is an acutely and extremely stressful experience, inducing distorted perception and intense emotional highs among edgeworkers [Lyng 1990]. As such, the ‘work’ of edgework involves deliberately seeking out the limits of human experience, testing one’s ability to effectively survive the extraordinary journey up to and back from the danger that lies beyond them.

There are a number of such ‘edges’ that competitors in MMA voluntarily contend with. Perhaps the most obvious are the physical boundaries between consciousness/unconsciousness and wholeness/brokenness, serving as mimetic approximations of life/death [Lyng 2012], which are typically negotiated in the course of any given fight. The technical rules and norms of the sport [see ABC 2017] ensure that these boundaries are ever-present in MMA fights; the wide array of techniques permitted to push one’s opponent across such boundaries multiply the objective physical dangers associated with sport-fighting. Further, the position occupied by MMA in what Wetzler [2015; 2018] refers to as the ‘polysystem’ of contemporary martial arts is that it is reputedly the most ‘real’, ‘violent’ and therefore dangerous form of sports fighting [Downey 2014]. This adds discursively-constructed meaning to participants’ understanding of its risks, deepening the
perceived seriousness and consequentiality of ‘stepping into the cage’ [Jensen et al. 2013; Telles et al. 2018]. In this sense, the widely-recognised, high-stakes consequences of MMA fighting are central to the emotional experiences it generates [Lyng 2018].

The subjective dimensions of risk alluded to here illustrate that psychological boundaries in MMA fights must also be actively negotiated as a consequence of facing the physical ones. Experiencing imminent danger to one’s physical safety posed by an attacking opponent induces a heightened emotional state, described by Randall Collins as ‘confrontational tension/fear’ (or CT/F) [2008]. For Collins, CT/F is a physiological response to direct conflict with another human being, which inhibits rational cognition and motor skills, and, accordingly, is the principal reason behind a generalised ‘pervasive incompetence’ associated with (most) human violence [2008: 63]. To effectively perform in an MMA match, fighters must therefore overcome the potentially debilitating psychosomatic effects of CT/F in order to remain competent and composed in a context replete with urgent risks to their physical self. In addition, both Jensen et al. [2013] and Vaccaro et al. [2011] reveal that fighters are beset with cognitive anxieties – typically fear of injury, or of losing fights and being humiliated in front of their friends. In the face of all this, they must navigate the boundary between composure and hysteria, as they risk being ‘scared to death’ [Jensen et al. 2013: 6] and becoming ‘lost in the deluge of emotions’ engendered by combat [Spencer 2014: 242].

The impact of such emotional turmoil is described in ways echoing Lyng’s [1990] discussion of the perceptual shifts experienced during edgework; fighters variously report losing peripheral vision [Brent and Kraska 2013], feeling ‘an incredible freedom’ [Andreasson and Johansson 2018: 10], being ‘sped up and put into slow motion at the same time’ [Abramson and Modzelewski 2011: 160], or having ‘little or no awareness of anyone outside the cage’ [Jensen et al. 2013: 8]. Similar to Collins’ [2008] account of the disorienting impact of CT/F [see also Spencer 2014], some fighters may freeze under such pressure, falling across the boundary separating active aggressor and passive victim [Wetzler 2018]. However, others learn to use the welling up of the ‘emotional energy’ characteristic of CT/F [Collins 2008] to fuel masterful fighting performances [Jensen et al. 2013]. Stenius quotes one fighter thus: ‘It’s like I disappear somewhere else, I’m just in a deep flow. I am not present in my body anymore; I am outside my body, not feeling the blows. They run off my body like water and fade away’ [2015: 86].

Such maintenance of emotional stability in the face of urgent danger illustrated here is indicative of a further key feature of edgework: the primary importance edgeworkers place on maintaining control in situations generally experienced as uncontrollable. According to Lyng, ‘the chance to exercise this “survival skill”’ seems to be what [edgeworkers] value most’ [1990: 871]. In order to effectively control evermore uncontrollable situations, edgeworkers must spend a significant amount of time preparing themselves for their journeys to the edge. To facilitate this, edgeworkers do not embrace risk unconditionally, tending to avoid gambling [Lyng 1990] or placing themselves in situations which they definitely cannot control [Bunn 2017]. Knowing exactly what risks they will face means edgeworkers can develop and rehearse the skills needed to engage in their chosen form of edgework, allowing them to control as many known variables as possible when doing so. In this way, risks are instrumentally selected to provide opportunities to experience feelings of mastery in the face of chaos; risks that do not provide these (or indeed, diminish them) are avoided. This ultimately ensures that edgeworkers’ psychological ability to remain in control is what is actually being tested when they approach the edge itself [Lyng 2014].

For competitive MMA fighters, engaging in long-term, rigorous physical training is a taken-for-granted norm. As mentioned above, the location of MMA within the contemporary martial arts polysystem presupposes that the ‘test’ it offers is the ‘ultimate’ challenge for martial artists, providing the strongest possible evaluation of one’s ability vis-à-vis alternative formats of competition [Green 2011; Mierzwinski et al. 2014]. The extremeness of its test thus calls for the most rigorous preparation. This features the development of a wide arsenal of offensive and defensive fighting techniques and strategies; an array of interpersonal, perceptual and emotional skills; and a well-conditioned, physically fit and robust body capable of dishing out and absorbing pain [Spencer 2009; 2014]. Indeed, the majority of time competitive MMA fighters spend invested in the sport is in training their bodies and minds for the culminating moment of a fight, wherein they will need to overcome not only a resisting opponent, but also the potentially crippling CT/F engendered within them by this experience [Vaccaro et al. 2011]. For competitive fighters, this training can become an all-consuming preoccupation [Abramson and Modzelewski 2011] and is fundamentally oriented towards preparing them for organised fights [Telles et al. 2018].

Importantly, the parameters of such fights are clearly defined, meaning the nature of the physical risks being taken are always well-known in advance. The existence of ‘unified rules’ of MMA [ABC 2017] – widely
available to view online, and regularly emphasised by referees to fighters in ‘rules talk’ sessions prior to matches – provides a meaningful framework for training in the skills required to engage in MMA edgework. These rules allow fighters to know what techniques might be deployed against them in combat, and detail strict spatial and temporal limits for the fight. In addition to these stable factors signified by clear rules, fighters also usually know who their opponent will be for some time before any given match and can tailor their training to specific strengths and weaknesses they possess [Spencer 2019]. Collectively, this means fighters have every opportunity to prepare themselves to demonstrate that they have ‘the right stuff’ [Lyng 1990: 859] to survive in the cage, meaning the fight becomes ‘more of a self test than a test of skill’ [Abramson and Modzelewski 201: 165]. In MMA therefore, ‘bodily risk-taking is seen as the experience of controlled, disciplined, and safe bodies, rather than their exposure to unpredictable harm’ [Stenius 2015: 87]; or, as O’Shea puts it, ‘the risk that fighters experience, far from being a reckless courting of danger, represents an opportunity to develop control and experience mastery’ [2019: 92].

Having thoroughly prepared for a clearly defined challenge, fighters are then able to experience such mastery in several ways. Most obviously, this sensation can arise through the effective execution of one’s skills, resulting in the domination of a resisting opponent [Brent and Kraska 2013], or the successful management of one’s own tumultuous emotions and/or physical pain [Jensen et al. 2013]. However, a further element of fighters’ preparation that bears mention in this respect is the phenomenon of ‘weight cutting’. Although the extremely dangerous measures adopted by many MMA fighters engaging in this practice clearly approach the edges of human physical endurance, strictly speaking this cannot be considered ‘edgework’, inasmuch as weight cutting in this context is not an autotelic practice but is typically viewed as a means towards the end of producing competitive success. However, as reported by Pettersson et al. [2013], successful weight cutting can also be taken as a sign of one’s self-mastery, similar in form to the phenomena described by Gailey [2009] in her study of women’s narratives of anorexia. Tellingly, fighters in Pettersson et al.’s [2013] study reported increased feelings of self-efficacy, but also enhanced self-identity as a fighter following difficult but successful weight cuts. Fighters who fail weight cuts, meanwhile, are often stigmatised as lacking discipline and being ‘unprofessional’ [e.g., McNulty 2018]. This serves to illustrate the fundamental importance of demonstrating (to oneself and others) that one is in control of oneself in the MMA milieu, via disciplined bodily performances that push up against the limits of the human organism.

AUTHENTICITY, SELF-ACTUALISATION AND EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Perhaps the most frequently evidenced aspect of edgework within the extant body of research on MMA is its relationship to notions of ‘authenticity’. Contextualising this, Lyng argues that edgework provides a route for individuals in late modernity to liberate themselves from the mental constraints of an ‘over-socialised’ life. Because it ‘involves circumstances that simply cannot be negotiated by relying on internalised social routines’, the logic of edgework suggests that successfully surviving an encounter with the edge becomes evidence of ‘one’s innate survival ability’ [1990: 875]. As such, edgeworkers ‘use their skills […] as forms of ontological exploration’ [2014: 449], finding out what they are truly made of in societies which provide few opportunities for such authentic self-examination. In this sense, the process constitutes what Lyng [2012] describes as a form of ‘hermeneutic reflexivity’: a route to reinterpreting one’s self-identity, foregrounding feelings of power and control gained through the experience of mastery in the face of extremely threatening risk. For individuals who otherwise feel lost, bored or powerless in the midst of highly regulated, late-modern social life, this makes edgework a profoundly valuable practice, as it is often understood as the only reliable way to experience an authentic sense of one’s own agency. 2

Such phenomena have been regularly noted within empirical studies of MMA. Commonly, fighters describe the allure of the sport in terms of its potential to test them like no other fighting discipline can [Spencer 2009], and thereby reveal deep, authentic truths about combat – and moreover, about themselves [Abramson and Modzelewski 2011]. For instance, Mierzewinski et al. [2014] draw on the concept of the ‘quest for excitement’ to illustrate women’s experiences of MMA’s emotional significance [see also Lyng 2018]. Their participants were drawn to competitive fighting not only because it represented a thrilling departure from their dull, daily routines, but because MMA

2 Weight cutting involves drastically dropping one’s bodyweight in order to qualify to compete in a lighter weight category than one’s regular weight, before rapidly increasing it again in the short period of time between the weigh-in and fight, and is a very common practice in contemporary MMA. Successfully doing so is believed to confer a competitive advantage by allowing a fighter to face off against a smaller opponent, although studies cast doubt on its utility as a performance-enhancing technique, as well as raise serious concerns about the health risks associated with certain weight cutting practices [see Hillier et al. 2019].

3 Throughout much of the work cited here, Lyng consistently contextualises edgework as a phenomenon associated with late modernity. As I understand Lyng’s intention, this aspect of his theorising is less about absolute historical specificity and more a matter of connecting a psychological construct with a socio-cultural/political economic context that facilitates it – which is not to say that other contexts could not facilitate the same sort of behaviour among the people living within them. My thanks to Kyle Barrowman for raising this critical observation.
represented the best chance to ‘see if [their] training would work’ [2014: 74] – that is, uncover the truth about their evolving fighting abilities. Meanwhile, Green [2011] emphasises the ‘realness’ of MMA as an embodied awareness arising from the painful nature of training; when participants suffer, they become more confident not only in the efficacy of the martial art they are learning, but also in themselves as carriers of that art’s potential. Pain was thus considered a route to gaining authentic self-knowledge: ‘participants commonly state “you don’t know yourself until you’ve been hit”’ [2011: 378]. Further still, Brent and Kraska [2013: 365] note that ‘fighting […] was a “release” and even a “liberating” experience from fighters’ overly regulated lives, supporting their paper’s titular claim that ‘fighting is the most real and honest thing’ they do. As such, participants in their study were able to see fighting as an integral part of their identity: ‘being a fighter is a big part of who I am […] fighting makes me, me’ [2013: 367–8].

Building on these opportunities for reflexivity and self-actualisation, Lyng argues that edgeworkers develop social bonds with each other on the basis of a shared admiration of their collective edgeworking ability, forming something of an elite social clique. This too is a common observation in studies of MMA; while Andreasson and Johansson [2018], Green [2011], and many others note the construction of an exclusive community among fighters, Abramson and Modelewski explain further that ‘[competitive] fighters are seen as special, different, and morally superior’ within MMA subcultures based on their sacrifice, suffering, and voluntary commitment to the sport [2011: 167]. Importantly, this phenomenon is not built (only) on competitive success; a typical refrain I have heard numerous times in my own fieldwork is that ‘anyone with the guts to step in the cage’ is deserving of the utmost respect [see Spencer 2009]. This phenomenon indicates that MMA fighters’ social standing is less a function of their combative prowess or competitive success, and more of their ability to *demonstrate character*, in a Goffmanian sense [Lyng 2014], by confronting the emotional onslaught – the CT/F – imposed by engaging in a cage fight. This is what allows their ‘true character’ to surface, becoming the basis for social validation within the subculture of the sport.

There is one important exception to note, however, which helps better illustrate the general rule about ‘stepping into the cage’. A common feature of the regional MMA circuit in the UK at present is the ‘independent fighter’ – typically a paid ‘journeyman’ competitor booked at the last minute to ‘save’ fights following late drop-outs, who deliberately offers very little resistance to the opponent whose fight they have ‘saved.’ These types of journeymen are held in very low regard by insiders in this community (such as the referees, medical staff, and fighters I conversed with) due to their pecuniary motivations, generally poor fighting skills, and lack of evident desire to compete:

During the fourth ‘professional’ bout on tonight’s card, two opponents of strikingly different appearance squared off against each other in the cage. One was taller, looked to be carrying several kilos more bodyweight, and was in excellent fighting shape, his thick muscles flexing under taught skin flushed pink from his warm-up. He hopped up and down on the spot, weight shifting from side to side, eyes intently fixed on the man across from him. His opponent, the ‘independent fighter’ we’d seen earlier, was pale and slim, his small, rounded belly sticking out above Thai boxing shorts that seemed too big for his skinny hips. Flat-footed and shoulders hunched, he glanced around nervously. Then the cage door shut, the bell rang, and the referee waved the men together. The first man charged, throwing a low kick to the thigh; the journeyman dropped, throwing up his hands to cover his head at once, making no effort to counter or evade. Drawing his knees up, he curled into a protective ball, lying on his side. The other fighter lay on top of him and swarmed him with hammer-fist blows, each one bouncing off a forearm or shoulder as the crowd cheered their approval. The referee gave the journeyman the customary warning to ‘fight back’, but barely waited for a response before leaning in to wave off the contest: the fight was over almost as soon as it had begun.

The paramedic I was shadowing (who was also herself a boxer), complained to me that she felt sorry for the fighter who’d quickly defeated this hapless opponent. His ten-second win meant the man had been ‘robbed’ of the test of his ability that a ‘real’ opponent would have given him. She claimed that such journeymen were ‘ruining this sport, making an absolute mockery of it’ by undermining the ‘honest’ challenge of the cage fight. Indeed, the victor’s body language suggested he had

4 This term typically refers to a type of ‘journeyman’ – a paid fighter who doesn’t hold serious aspirations of becoming a championship contender – often booked by promoters of lower-level shows in order to avoid having to issue refunds for tickets sold by fighters whose opponents withdraw from competition shortly before their fight. Although relatively rare, at one event I observed in 2018, almost all of the bouts featured these poorly skilled independent fighters, much to the consternation of several groups of fans. It is worth noting that not all fighters described as journeymen fit this model; some are highly skilled and well-respected in the MMA community.
experienced his easy win as hollow and anti-climactic, as he waved gingerly to his friends in the crowd and shrugged, lips pursed in a vexed expression, receiving mute applause for his efforts.  
[Field notes, May 2018]

Evacuating any semblance of risk from the fight by offering no resistance, the ‘independent fighter’ profaned a space otherwise reserved for authentic tests of character. Thus, despite ‘stepping into the cage’, such fighters are not considered to share in the glory of the arena and cannot lay claim to being a true part of its exclusive community. Further, when the role they play effectively deprives others of the chance to experience the intense emotional struggle associated with the edgework of MMA, and thus the opportunity to engage in reflexive self-actualisation, they are cast by many as persona-non-gratae in the field.

CHARTING PARTNERED EDGEWORK EXPERIENCES IN MMA

To summarise the discussion so far, the typical features of edgework as described by Lyng [1990] can be seen to apply reasonably well to MMA. The open-endedness, intensity, and unpredictability of the sport typically involves the voluntary navigation of several high-stakes boundaries, potentially generating powerful emotional states that provide participants opportunities to demonstrate mastery in the face of chaos. This gives MMA fighters the sense that they are developing ‘unique experiential knowledge that only [they] can comprehend’ [Spencer 2009: 136], revealing deep truths about themselves that become powerful sources of self-identity, as well as the basis for constructing exclusive, elite communities within and around the sport. For many fighters, these dynamics confer a great deal of value on their participation in MMA; Brent and Kraska summarise this well in noting that ‘a central theme, shared by all those we worked with, [was that] fighting enriched these participants’ lives’ [2013: 364].

COLLABORATIVE CO-ACTION AND COMMITMENT TO THE TEST

Despite these conceptual synergies, MMA is a somewhat unique practice when compared to other forms of edgework. As illustrated by the case of the ‘independent fighter’, where MMA differs is that it is fundamentally dependent upon collaborative co-action to bring about edgework’s typical outcomes. That is, although the logic of competitive sport casts them as opponents, fighters facing each other in an MMA bout simultaneously facilitate one-another’s edgework at the same time as they oppose each other in the match. When fighting, they are collaborating to produce in each other the emotional experiences conducive to the pursuit of highly valued self-knowledge that lies at the heart of MMA’s unique and powerful appeal. In this sense, edgework in MMA requires a partner to ‘actually construct the edge’ that is to be worked [Newmahr 2011: 692, original emphasis]; the emotional experience it offers is impossible for individuals to realise alone and, indeed, its achievement in the sport is entirely conditional upon the effectiveness of these partnerships.³

Importantly, while training in MMA requires overtly collaborative, often passive, only partially competitive partners to help develop one’s skills, the edgework represented by MMA competition requires full, adversarial commitment from one’s partner-opponent in order to be realised. Although the staging of a cage fight [Stenius 2011] and the dangerous reputation of the sport [Downey 2014] might be enough to stimulate the kind of pre-fight nerves reported by Jensen et al. [2013], Vaccaro et al. [2011] and others, the sustained, back-and-forth, painful struggle of experiencing a ‘real’ fight is what constitutes the stuff of MMA’s potential for deep reflexivity and self-actualisation. As Green describes it, ‘pain makes the experience real’ [2011: 384] – so in the absence of such ‘real’, physical danger, as most readily signified by pain, the opportunity to engage in edgework is diminished.⁶

In this light, the disparagement of ‘independent fighters’ noted above makes more sense. Interestingly, I noted a different manifestation of this phenomenon at another low-level, professional MMA show:

Following a finish in the first round of the evening’s heavyweight main event, the losing fighter – who, over the course of three slow, gruelling minutes had been pinned down and repeatedly punched in the body and head before the referee intervened to end the fight – effortlessly shrugged off the medic who was attending him. He strode across the cage with a beaming smile on his reddened, bloodied face, arms outstretched to his opponent revealing ugly welts on

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5 Newmahr’s [2011] conceptualisation of sadomasochism as edgework highlights a very similar phenomenon. Although a comparison of the features of sadomasochism and MMA is beyond the scope of this article, Weinberg [2016] provides a thorough discussion of the two, principally with respect to the contested legality of what she calls ‘consensual violence’, which is well worth the reader’s time.

6 As an interesting aside, Brett’s [2017] analysis of the aesthetic judgement of fights by MMA commentators provides further clues as to the value of well-matched, hard-fought, painful bouts within the sport, for their ability to reveal fighters’ true character (among other things).
his battered torso. He embraced the man and they exchanged back slaps, then held each other by the shoulders to talk. From my seat at cageside, I clearly heard the loser apologise to the winner for not having put up a better fight. He complemented the man’s technique and power, and repeated his apology, as the victor smiled, graciously telling him not to worry, attributing his dominant win to ‘just a good bit of luck’ for landing an early takedown.

[Field Notes, April 2018]

Here, the losing fighter’s primary concern, after taking a severe beating and while a frustrated medic was trying to check him for signs of brain damage, was in letting the man who had just beaten him up know that he was sorry for failing to effectively provide the challenge that was expected of him. In addition to hinting at a concern for the missed opportunities for edgework that a more even bout could have provided, this fighter openly demonstrates an affinity with the needs and desires of his opponent, providing important clues as to the orientation to the other that MMA competition often involves.

**RESPECTING, CARING AND PROVIDING FOR THE OTHER**

Although apologising for taking a beating might be somewhat rare, other overt displays of affection and respect between fighters are not. At every event I have attended, a good proportion of the competitors (if not the clear majority) would embrace, kiss, high-five or bow to their opponent, praising each other’s abilities and expressly thanking each other for their fight upon its conclusion – both in the cage, and/or backstage afterwards. This is often the case for both winning and losing competitors, and although it does not happen after every fight, it is common enough to describe as a norm in MMA. Further, fighters will very often check on their opponents in the cage after fights end via stoppages (i.e., knockouts, submissions, or referee interventions), with some fighters remaining in contact with former opponents after fights [Andreasson and Johansson 2018], or checking on their welfare by visiting them (in hospital, for instance) following injuries [Doyle 2015].

Such behaviour resonates neatly with Lyng’s [1990] observation regarding the respect that is fostered among communities of edgeworkers, comprising social bonds reflective of a shared understanding of a unique human experience, and mutual admiration for the courage and skills required to live these out. Fighters’ accounts of how they think about their opponents add depth to these observations. To aid in the psychologically difficult task of fighting intently with a person they respect, some fighters adopt a neutral, business-like mentality to the fight itself, casting the instance of the match as an impersonal meeting: ‘there’s no bad blood, [it’s] just business […] When it’s over, it’s over’ [Jensen et al. 2013: 8]. A typical sentiment among fighters is that they ‘don’t look upon their opponent as an enemy or an idiot […] most of my relationships with my opponents have been good’ [Andreasson and Johansson 2018: 12]. Perhaps most tellingly though, the mutuality and co-dependent nature of fighting is often foregrounded: ‘we are in it together, him and me, it’s our game, we do this together’ [quoted in Stenius 2011: 91].

Within such a context of harbouring no ill-will, generally enjoying positive relationships, and recognising the importance of the mutuality of their craft, causing serious harm, injury, or lasting damage to opponents is generally understood as undesirable [Abramson and Modzelewski 2011]. Setting out with the intention to cause lasting damage to the other is framed as incompatible with the collaborative nature of partnered edgework in the sport. This makes for an interesting paradox: fighters must intentionally use techniques which inflict pain and possibly injury if they are to provide an ‘ultimate’ test of fighting ability constitutive of a genuine MMA fight, with its associated onrush of CT/F, painful physical consequences, and assurances of ‘realness’. But fighters generally do not do this with the intention of causing serious harm; as one of Stenius’ interviewees argued, ‘we don’t try to injure each other, that’s not what MMA is about’ [2015: 86]. What MMA is about, rather, is the joint pursuit of the intense emotional experience and profound self-knowledge that contesting an ‘ultimate’ fight can generate [O’Shea 2019]. The chance to face down the risks posed by a resisting opponent in such a contest thereby becomes a high-value service that fighters can and must provide for each other if fighting is to make sense.

By drawing on the concept of edgework, we can therefore see that MMA fighters are helping each other, becoming the ultimate challenge by embodying the risks that their partner desires to face. A particularly acute illustration of this, which invites direct parallels with the edgework of mountaineering [Bunn 2017], is when a fighter explained to me backstage at a professional event in mid-2018 that the opponent he would face that night was ‘going to be my Everest’. He lost that fight to a judges’ decision, but gaily walked away from the cage shoulder-to-shoulder with his vanquisher, evidently pleased with his journey up and down the mountain.

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7 Other reactions that are fairly common are for fighters to be overcome with emotion, crying in the cage or hurrying backstage, away from public view; or to simply take the result in their stride, expressing limited overt gratitude to their opponent. Only very rarely have I seen fighters express any kind of mockery or hostility towards their opponents in the aftermath of an MMA match.
COLLABORATIVE EDGECWORK: SHIFTING FROM ‘VIOLENCE’ TO ‘MUTUALLY CONSTRUCTED RISK’

So far, I have argued that the concept of edgework offers valuable insight by foregrounding the essentially collaborative nature of the production of ‘authentic’ experiences in full-contact fighting, which empirical research shows to be highly valued by fighters. I propose that embracing this concept offers martial arts studies scholars opportunities to deepen our theoretical understanding of combat sports, mostly because it helps us understand what O’Shea [2019: 55] describes as ‘one of the central paradoxes of sport fighting’: how fighters can simultaneously try to cause harm to each other while also caring about each other’s welfare, feelings and desires. Indeed, it allows us to see how the former becomes a logical extension of the latter. While this notion might illuminate a number of debates and open pathways for several research trajectories, I contend that it is particularly informative with respect to the contentious ethical and theoretical problem of the ‘violence’ of combat sports. It is to this problem that I now turn.

MMA AS ‘INHERENTLY VIOLENT’

Since its inception in the early 1990s, modern MMA has been dogged by public criticism of its apparent barbarity, necessitating image management strategies to facilitate the sport’s development and commercial growth [Downey 2014]. Often, scholarly research on MMA has taken a fairly critical view of the simplistic and stigmatising construction of the sport as an unrestrained celebration of violence, principally by foregrounding nuanced socio-historical narratives of sport and violence more widely, and/or by attending to the lived realities of MMA fighters themselves to complicate such straightforward moral condemnation. However, others have been more sceptical about the sport. In perhaps the most scathing example of scholarly criticism to date, Dixon [2015: 365] characterises MMA as ‘a paradigm case of violent sport’ centred on deliberately trying to injure other people, arguing that competitive MMA fights are an ‘intrinsically immoral’ activity. Building his thesis around the claim that it is a ‘prime instance of treating opponents as worthless objects rather than as intrinsically valuable ends in themselves’ [2015: 369], Dixon challenges proponents of MMA to prove him wrong.

In a second articulation of the same argument, Dixon [2016] offers something that few scholars discussing MMA’s ‘violence’ have overtly attempted – an actual definition of violence itself around which to frame his case. He draws on what he describes as ‘the admirably neutral account of violence’ offered by Robert Simon [Simon et al. 2015: 238], as ‘the use of physical force designed to harm others’, before adding that ‘violence is prima facie wrong and stands in need of justification’ [Dixon 2016: 102]. Further, he clarifies that ‘it would be sophistical to deny that [MMA is] violent’ [2016: 102], since the means of winning competitive bouts depends upon ‘hurting and injuring’ opponents. Although Dixon’s argument offers only the slimmest engagement with the thoughts and experiences of actual MMA competitors, resting otherwise on what is best described as armchair criticism, a similar taxonomical approach to ‘violence’ appears in many other papers that adopt a more empirically robust perspective (although, for the most part, these offer no overt definition of ‘violence’). That is to say, in the vast majority of scholarship on MMA (including most of the papers cited above), the ‘violence’ of the sport is left unchallenged as a taken-for-granted, ontologically fixed attribute, wherein MMA is casually described as a violent sport or a sport premised upon doing violence to one’s opponent.8

This pervasive trend is also evident in several studies wherein researchers have, in fact, attempted to problematize such notions of ‘violence’ as a direct corollary of engaging with the meanings constructed around and through participants’ experiences. A decent illustration of this can be found inAbramson and Modzelewski’s [2011] ethnography. Anticipating, perhaps, the criticisms of those like Dixon [2015; 2016], they state that the superficial and analytically erroneous arguments of the ‘rhetorician or cultural critic’ in conflating ‘aesthetics with meaning’ to suggest the appeal of MMA to fighters is the chance to engage in and celebrate violence, are ‘impossible to sustain’ once investigating the milieu of MMA up-close [2011: 158]. Calling into question the use of the term itself, they also argue that ‘if [MMA] is violence, it is a peculiar form of codified, agreed upon, and “controlled violence”’ [2011: 160, emphasis added]. Elsewhere, they note that ‘fighters repeatedly invoke the distinction between a sportive contest […] and what they see as true violence’ [2011: 160, emphasis added], suggesting that MMA is not experienced as ‘truly’ violent by its practitioners. However, elsewhere throughout their paper, they still regularly refer to the action of MMA as ‘violent’ or involving ‘violence’, without much attention to qualifying exactly what they mean or differentiating between, for example, ‘types’ of violence, as would seem necessary from the above.

In some cases the language used to describe this is particularly misleading. For instance, some refer to heightened ‘levels’ of violence in MMA compared to other combat sports, implying that they have discovered a way to isolate, quantify and reliably measure certain units of violence across contexts. Others refer to the sport’s ‘taw’ or ‘primordial’ violence, presupposing a kind of typology that is never defined or explained. Importantly, such claims are often made in ways which suggest an objective judgement on the part of scholars, and not a critical comment on societal perceptions. These kinds of claims do nothing to enhance the analytical clarity of scholarly research on sport and violence.
In light of this trend, Christopher R. Matthews and I proposed a theoretical model for understanding sports-related violence which, we argue, is suitable for analytically differentiating between actions generally understood as violent, but which are experienced very differently by those involved in them in particular contexts. Specifically, we argued that attempts to theorise sports-related violence should attend to both the force involved in an action but also the extent to which that action constitutes a violation of the individuals involved. In other words, for violence to occur, there must be both force and violation, wherein individuals are forcefully deprived of their ability to autonomously determine themselves and their actions [Matthews and Channon 2017]. We noted that this ‘clarity is vitally important considering the morally evaluative nature of the term “violence”’ [2017: 760] – as per Dixon’s [2016] framing of even a ‘neutral’ understanding of violence as involving actions which are ‘prima facie wrong’. And, since all competitive MMA fights should meet the criteria we associated with force (and upon which others’ casual uses of the term ‘violence’ seem to depend), questioning whether or not violations happen becomes a key analytical focus for evaluating the morality of full-contact fighting sports [see also O’Shea 2019].

Drawing on interactionist sociology, we further argued that the exact conduct of people engaged in ostensibly violent actions, as well as the subjective meanings constructed around the experience of being involved, are crucial to determining whether or not either party has been violated, and therefore whether or not ‘violence’ is a suitable label to describe these acts [Channon and Matthews 2018]. Thus, the notion of consent becomes crucial in helping to determine where violence begins and ends. Put simply, if MMA matches are conducted in ways which carefully and faithfully facilitate informed, reflexive, and explicitly consensual actions, then they are not definitively violent, and thus, by extension, not deserving of the typical moral critique they are in violating others’. Following this paternalistic dismissal of the consent principle, Dixon attempts to insulate his criticism from what he imagines as an obvious retort regarding sportsmanship in MMA: ‘professional respect among cage fighters […] cannot transform violent acts into anything more than attempts to hurt and injure’ [376].

However, while our argument might carry weight with some athletes who have lived out the difference between what we framed as violent and non-violent fights, it offers little to appease Dixon, who states that consent is ‘not the moral trump card that it is often claimed to be’ [2015: 371]. Here, Dixon adopts the position that because MMA fights involve what he interprets as essentially ‘demeaning’ interactions, they cannot be morally excused by the presence of consent since they nevertheless violate ‘inalienable rights to dignity and against being treated as an object to damage’ [371], which ‘all the mutual consent in the world is insufficient to negate’ [2016: 111]. Furthermore, because MMA fighters ‘consent to letting others treat them as having inferior worth’ [2015: 371], they are just as culpable in failing to respect their own dignity as they are in violating others’. Following this paternalistic dismissal of the consent principle, Dixon attempts to insulate his criticism from what he imagines as an obvious retort regarding sportsmanship in MMA: ‘professional respect among cage fighters […] cannot transform violent acts into anything more than attempts to hurt and injure’ [376].

As readers will have no doubt surmised, I am not particularly impressed with Dixon’s [2015; 2016] work. In particular, I find his lack of attention to the wide body of empirical research on MMA and its athletes inexcusable given the kinds of claims he makes about what fighters intend, what they think and feel about their sport and their opponents, and what meanings should be attached to their experiences in the cage. Within this body of work (much of which was available to read long before his papers were published), there are abundant examples of fighters’ narratives, phenomenological accounts of fighting, and observations of fight interactions that directly contradict Dixon’s assumptions, as discussed at length above. As I hope to have indicated so far in this paper, particularly when contextualised by viewing MMA as edgework, such arguments as Dixon’s begin to unravel in the face of these findings.

Indeed, when confronted with the question of whether they perceive MMA as violent, barbaric, or otherwise immoral, fighters often respond by explicitly foregrounding the role the sport plays in enabling them to experience edgework: ‘we weren’t thugs. We were nice guys, who simply wanted to keep on doing an ultimate sport, measuring

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9 For a lengthy debate over the veracity of our definition of violence (but not, necessarily, the associated issue of morality) see Barrowman and Channon [2018].
our capabilities and strengths in the cage’ [quoted in Andreasson and Johansson 2018: 7]; ‘fighting can look brutal, even to me […] but it’s about your character, to become and appear as something, in front of the crowd and the opponent’ [quoted in Stenius 2011: 91]. This troubles the assumption that fighters lack self-respect by subjecting their bodies to potential damage, as the process is clearly oriented towards reflexive self-examination, self-improvement, and affirmative identity construction [Green 2011; Spencer 2009].

Moreover, as Weimer comments in his philosophical response to Dixon, MMA participants ‘fight because they ‘get something’ out of the activity, something that will in most cases relate to a genuine need, and they want to make sure that their opponent ‘gets something’ out of it as well’ [Weimer 2017: 266]. Although Weimer’s paper is similarly devoid of empirically-derived examples, his argument is built on presuppositions that are incidentally well-evidenced in the research literature. Of particular relevance is that he echoes the claim that fighters see MMA as ‘a unique test of character that is unavailable elsewhere’ [Abramson and Modzelewski 2011: 166], voiding the patronising suggestion that fighters ought to do something else to get their kicks [Dixon 2015: 370]. Thus, the simplistic characterisation of MMA as violent and destructive fails to understand the unique psychological rewards that it offers participants, the fact that fighters’ efforts to ‘hurt each other’ in the cage are inseparable from the process of producing opportunities for each other to experience these uniquely rewarding sensations, and that fighters generally recognise this phenomenon when articulating the moral meanings of their participation.

Seen in this way, fighters are not ‘demeaned’ as victimised, worthless objects of one another’s violence, but instead become vehicles for, and recipients of, knowledge about themselves and each other, granted through mutually consenting engagement in painful, dangerous, nerve-wracking, high-risk combat. The parameters of what are deemed acceptable risks to take in constituting this edgework – what fighters consent to face, and dedicate their time and energy in preparing themselves to endure, overcome, and master – are unambiguously understood beforehand, and are maintained in situ through the institutional structures which enable competitive fights. The rationalised, contained, prepared-for chaos comprising edgework [Lyng 1990] is brought to life by the intentional efforts of fighters who are at once antagonists and collaborators, supporting each other in a quest for knowledge facilitated by what they perceive to be the ‘ultimate test’ of full-contact, mixed discipline fighting [O’Shea 2019]. That they experience their participation as a path to deeply meaningful reflexivity and self-actualisation, shaping positive self-identities and bonding them to others within an exclusive community of peers, puts the lie to the suggestion that fighters do not see themselves and their opponents as intrinsically valuable ‘ends in themselves’. When examined on fighters’ own terms, competitive MMA is seen as more-or-less the exact opposite, with would-be antagonists playing an important role in enriching one-another’s lives [Brent and Kraska 2013].

To conclude my argument then, I propose that edgework be used as a conceptual device to shift academic discourse on the action of MMA away from a simplistic, one-dimensional and empirically questionable framing as ‘violence’. Unqualified use of this term is currently common throughout the literature on this sport, simultaneously ignoring the voices of athletes who explicitly state that they do not experience MMA fighting as violence [see Abramson and Modzelewski 2011; Andreasson and Johansson 2018; Stenius 2011], while inadvertently reinforcing the foundations of a stigma surrounding the sport that many authors otherwise recognise as problematic. In its place then, I propose using the notion of mutually constructed risk. Within a paradigm that recognises the importance of both force and violation for constituting ‘violence’, along with the necessity of carefully employing this term given its profound moral implications [Matthews and Channon 2017], MMA fights that proceed on a clear basis of mutual consent cannot be fairly described as violent. This does not mean that they do not still involve very real dangers, the likes of which enable participants to mimetically experience the same emotional sensations (i.e., CT/F) generated by ‘real’ violence [see Collins 2008]. To make sense of the production of this danger as a process framed by consent, and by attending to the nature of the relationship between the individuals involved in such MMA fights, we must acknowledge the high degree of collaboration in producing risks that approximate – but do not necessarily become – violence. In this way, the action of MMA, as collaborative edgework, is best understood as mutually constructed risk, and not violence.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

As a closing series of clarifications, I wish to briefly address both the limits of the notion that MMA is not definitively violent outlined above, as well as some wider possibilities regarding the application of ‘edgework’ to explaining MMA. Firstly, as Matthews and I have argued previously, the observation that sport fighting is not inherently violent is not the same as saying it is never violent [Channon and Matthews 2018]. Our argument rests on the recognition and maintenance of mutual consent, which means there are manifold ways in which sports such as MMA can become violent if the interactions occurring within them deviate from those to which participants have explicitly consented. These would include anything participants are subjected to without consent; any instances of consent being manipulatively or coercively obtained or given without proper understanding of what
Edgework and Mixed Martial Arts
Alex Channon

is being consented to; occasions wherein opponents or others do not respect athletes’ withdrawal of consent, or athletes are compelled against their wishes to not withdraw it; any example of consent being given with diminished capacity; and so on. Seen in this light, it is highly unlikely that any kind of fighting, outside of the typical parameters and institutional structures of formal, rationally organised combat sports, can be effectively seen as ‘not really violent’ [see Jackson-Jacobs 2014: 182 for an interesting exception], as these parameters provide a clear framework around which consent can be constructed and maintained. This perspective also highlights the ethical importance of working to clarify and explicitly foreground participants’ agency in determining the conditions of their participation in combat sports, which I see as a very worthwhile endeavour.

Secondly, it has not been my intention to suggest that MMA is always undertaken as a form of edgework, or is always guaranteed to be successful when undertaken as such (my use of examples illustrating the failure of MMA as edgework should have illustrated this, although I suspect there are many more ways in which such failures might occur). Following Bunn [2017], it is crucial to understand that despite edgework involving objective dangers, risk is subjectively experienced and therefore what might constitute a psychologically profound confrontation with a perceived ‘edge’ for one person may not hold the same significance for another. Bunn [2017: 1312] applies this recognition to critique the role of boxing in constituting edgework; his criticism may just as well apply to MMA. This may particularly be the case considering the distinction between a professional fighter with an extensive history of competitive sport fighting and a debuting amateur (although many of the works consulted above suggest that seasoned veterans still experience MMA in ways that are conducive to edgework). A further distinction regarding amateurs and professionals might be considered with respect to what motivates them [Weimer 2017]; driven by financial gain and hoping to further their careers with victories, rather than to test themselves through intense emotional experience, might mean that professionals are less likely to fit the model of edgework as I have outlined here; or at least, they might experience MMA as edgework in different ways. Such questions as these deserve to be purposefully tested through empirical research, particularly if we accept that edgework plays a role in the moral legitimacy of the sport, as I have argued.

Thirdly, although the question of violence is an important one to consider, the concept of edgework potentially offers more to the study of contemporary combat sports than this alone. Further routes of enquiry might do well to centre the macro-micro conceptualisations articulated by Lyng [1990] to expand on research into the emergence of MMA, and particularly its relative popularity among specific demographic groups [see Abramson and Modzelewski 2011; Green 2016; Lyng 2018]. Such enquiries may also wish to place a focus on the often uneven power structures that exist within professional MMA in particular, wherein fighters’ vulnerability to economic exploitation may be exacerbated by the ‘culture of risk’ [Nixon 1992] that can be said to exist within this sport. If fighters collectively perceive the courting of danger and acceptance of personal risks as evidence of good character, then efforts at pushing for greater regulations to enhance athletes’ safety and welfare may struggle to win broad, grassroots support. As is the case in other professional sports, such initiatives often run against the interests of corporate management, meaning the moral validation of risk-taking among athletes may work against their interests in the context of class-based conflict over the control of athletic labour [see Kalman-Lamb 2019]. As such, the cultural validation of risk-taking among fighters may assume importance in critically appraising a rather different aspect of the ethics of contemporary MMA.

Elsewhere, attention to the insights the concept provides on the role of broader socio-cultural and political-economic configurations in influencing individual risk-taking might see edgework used with good effect to speak critically to what Abramson and Modzelewski describe as the ‘sociologically inadequate’ [2011: 162] thesis describing MMA’s popularity exclusively with reference to men and masculinity. This could be particularly instructive when considering gender-essentialist discourses linking MMA with men’s ‘natural’ inclinations to violence in apparently ‘feminising’ societies [see Judkins 2015], but also superficial, pro-feminist critiques that see the sport as little more than an exercise in patriarchal reproduction. Finally, given that several authors have noted that edgework carries a certain amount of conceptual baggage regarding masculinity itself [e.g. Laurendeau 2011; Newmahr 2011], scope remains to critically engage with debates in the wider literature on the concept by discussing both the potentially ‘feminised’ aspects of MMA practice performed by men [see Abramson and Modzelewski 2011: 156–8] and the increasing presence of women in competitive MMA [Mierzwinski et al. 2014]. In these and other ways, it is my hope that this essay can stimulate further, productive use of edgework as a theoretical tool in the expanding martial arts studies research literature.


Jensen, Peter, Jorge Roman, Barrett Shaft and Craig Wrisberg. 2013. ‘In the Cage: MMA Fighters’ Experience of Competition’, The Sport Psychologist 27.1, 1–12. doi.org/10.1123/tsp.27.1.1


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The ‘52 Hand Blocks’ is a fighting style associated with African-Americans and penal institutions in the United States. In the closing decades of the 20th century, interest in the ‘52s’ was fanned by references in popular media. The debate over its real-world existence and origins spanned from African-descended folk arts to the ring strategies of professional boxers who learned to box while inmates in juvenile detention facilities. Inevitably, those searching for an origin sought to identify a founder and a direct lineage. In oral tradition, the leading candidate was Mother Dear, a predatory homosexual and inmate of the New York penal system who reportedly used the 52s to beat reluctant sexual partners into submission. According to legend, adepts learned the 52s while incarcerated, frequently after being raped by their mentors. Additional research reveals that the Mother Dear archetype was neither unique nor confined to the African-American community. In fact, substantially similar characters who combine physical strength, fighting ability, and homosexuality appear across the prison lore of the United States. This study explores the psychological and social functions of these figures, with particular emphasis on Mother Dear and his relationship to similar anti-heroes in African-American oral tradition.
The ‘52 Hand Blocks’ is a vernacular African-American fighting style that is alleged to have originated in penal institutions in the United States. A variety of other styles exist along with the ‘52s’, such as Stato and Comstock (both named after prisons in New York state), for example. The following comments use the umbrella term Jailhouse Rock for the various prison fighting styles. The term 52s refers to a specific variant of Jailhouse Rock, a variant that derives techniques from literally any source available, including boxing, Asian martial arts, folk styles of combat, and dance. This martial bricolage is characterized by strategies, rhythms, and attitudes based in the interplay of the destructive and the artistic [Green 2012].

Douglas Century describes the use of the 52s in a detention center fight in his book, Street Kingdom:

“Kev took Peter Chaplain to school that day, put on a wicked exhibition of his fledgling fifty-two hand-blocks. [...] He was doing backhands, windmills, blocking the pervert’s punches between two clenched forearms, kissing the useless fist and throwing it back at him like a pair of soiled drawers. And as he was tagging him up, shuffling, dancing backward, he started to taunt his beaten opponent.

[Century 1999: 77-79]“

Significant elements of the 52s are seen in this passage, ones that appear repeatedly in informants’ discussions: the signature forearm catch and kiss, characterization of the fight as an exhibition, taunting and humiliating the opponent; all mark the performance dimension of the style.

At the turn of the 21st century, during (primarily online) debates about the authenticity and even the existence of the system, speculation attempted to explain the meaning of the name ‘52 hand blocks’. Among the more convincing arguments was the one supported by Dennis Newsome and Douglas Century, among others: that the ‘52’ references ‘52 Card Pick-up’, the prank masquerading as a game in which the butt of the joke is invited to play the card game. In 52 Card Pick Up, upon acceptance, the trickster throws a deck of 52 cards into the air and challenges the victim to pick them up. The unstructured nature of the fallen cards’ configuration, the need to respond to this random situation and the guileful mindset of the prankster all reflect elements of the fighting style.

Of greater relevance to the present analysis, however, are allegations by some informants that the 52s were associated with the 5% Nation of Islam, and that the name itself is rooted in their religious philosophy. The 5% Nation of Islam is also known as the Nation of Gods and Earths, due to the labeling of male followers as Gods and the female followers, Earths. The religion was established by Clarence 13X (birth name, Clarence Smith), a former member of the Nation of Islam, sometime after 1963. Their teachings were encapsulated in a system of divine mathematics with attributes represented by combinations of numbers. According to Nation of Gods and Earths numerology (‘Mathematics’), 5 (wisdom) plus 2 (power) equals 7; this in turn describes God (or perfection) [Swedenburg 1997]. The religion gained popularity among African-American inmates in the late twentieth century. The 52s were said to be a ‘war tactic’ used by the 5%ers to defend against the White supremacist gangs which were said to thrive in the prison context [Daniel Marks 2003, personal communication].

In the closing decades of the 20th century, interest in prison born systems was fanned by references to Jailhouse Rock in the popular media. The earliest of these saw print in 1974. A former inmate reported in an article published in Black Belt magazine that ‘[t]he different [New York state] prisons had and still have their own fighting styles’ [Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]. In this article, poet and playwright Miguel Piñero, who was incarcerated repeatedly from the age of eleven, attested to the existence of fighting styles he had learned during his many prison terms and even demonstrated the Comstock cover. Piñero reported:

“The first thing I did in the joint was to check out the style and learn to fight with a home piece – somebody from my neighborhood on the streets. I learned the Woodbourne shuffle, an evasion technique that first was used in the joint at Woodbourne and got passed around. Then I learned wall-fighting, and somebody taught me the Comstock style.

[Darling and Perryman 1974: 21]“

Dennis Newsome, capoeira mestre (master) and Afrikanist researcher, generated interest in Jailhouse Rock through his work as fight choreographer for the Mel Gibson film, Lethal Weapon [Warner 1987]. A popular article about the film by Terry O’Neill briefly documented ‘Jailhouse Rock’ and featured Mel Gibson demonstrating moves learned from Newsome [O’Neill 1987].

In 1999, journalist Douglas Century published Street Kingdom: Five Years Inside the Franklin Avenue Posse, in which he depicted contemporary gangs, crime, and hip-hop culture in Brooklyn. In this book and in a 2001 article and photographs of practitioners in Details magazine, Century clearly documents the existence of a street variant of Jailhouse Rock known as the 52 Hand Blocks.

With the substantiation of the real-world existence of the 52s came a search for origins and originators. The quest for origins led from African-descended vernacular martial arts to the ring strategies of
professionals such as Floyd Patterson and Mike Tyson who learned to box while inmates in criminal detention facilities. Eventually, the search led to pursuit of a direct lineage, a founder. The leading candidate was Mother Dear, said to be a predatory Black homosexual and inmate of the New York penal system. According to this narrative, Mother Dear used the 52s to beat reluctant sexual partners into submission. Oral tradition further claimed that adepts learned the 52s while incarcerated, frequently after being raped by their mentors. Additional research reveals that the Mother Dear tale type is neither unique nor confined to the African-American community. In fact, substantially similar characters who combine physical strength, fighting ability, and homosexuality appear as Boxing Betty, Brutus, and similar figures across the prison lore of the United States [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]. Here, we are interested in what might be called the ‘cultural message’ of such figures, with particular emphasis on Mother Dear.

**MOTHER DEAR**

The following seven Mother Dear narratives, while part of a much larger corpus, are representative.¹

**Legend 1**

In my teens [in the 1980s] I use to hang out with a lot of ‘Five Percenters’ that was very good with 52 blocks. Many of these individuals was from Jamaica Queens [NY] that learn the style when they was in Rikersland [Rikers Island Prison] from this cat that was called Mother Dear. This brother Mother Dear I was told was gay, but he was a killer with the 52 blocks, because he was the individual that invented the style, a GAY GUY! From what I was told when a new jack [new convict] come, if Mother Dear like him, that new jack had to freely give it up, or get ‘ROCK’ THE HARD WAY [from ‘get rocked’: to take a beating] Not many cats from Brooklyn want to talk about these facts and truth about the true originator of the style that was a ass taker of this Jailhouse Rock style. Hahaha!

**Legend 2**

Also [...] a lot of ‘5 percenters’ followed in Mother Dear’s footsteps and starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks. But the best I heard of were 3 people. One was a brother named Tweety Love who was undefeated. He was known to walk [away] from any kind of fight without a scratch, one or many, and was shot to death because of the fact. The other 2 were known on Rikers Island. Here in NY. I believe this because I got it from 2 separate sources and got bits and pieces from diverse people over a span of years. Believe it or not! It’s on you. I’m just relaying what I got.

These 2 guys were brothers [Mother Dear and Mother Nature, according to a separate account] and they both were gay. Anyway, they were known for seeing someone they liked, and if you didn’t submit to their approach, they beat you to submission. I’m not talking about raping a guy. I’m talking about the guy had to do them [assume the active rather than the passive role in a sexual encounter]. They were flaming Gay, as close to being women as they could be. I don’t know the end of their story, but I was told they were unbeatable and nobody messed with them.

**Legend 3**

Most older cats that been to jail and been in some shit on the streets will tell you that back in the days many of the brothers that learn the real 52 blocks got rock first, got they ass hit from behind by this big gay cat named Mother Dear. They never tell you that, because many back then had to keep playing the hardcore role, if brother on the outside knew that you got punk, raped, they knew that you get no respect. Soon a brother get free from jail and back in the streets of they urban community if found out they got punk [submitted to a homosexual relationship] that most likely got beat down bad, and god help you if you was a God [a male 5%er and therefore adamantly opposed to homosexuality]! Many in the hoods know this big gay cat named Mother Dear was the true originator of the 52 jailhouse fighting style. Many Gods use to tell me this cat Mother Dear was so nice [his style was at such a high level] with the 52 style that he could catch a person jab or punch and kiss [the puncher’s fist] at the same time counterattack. The tale that been running around for years of Mother Dear down fall in the hoods of NYC, is a new jack terrified that Mother Dear was going to try and rape him [that he] bum rush [aggressive charge] Mother Dear out of fear while he was standing near a jail high balcony, and Mother Dear fall to his death!

**Legend 4**

An interesting story, a guy named Mother Dear on the east coast took out 9 inmates also using jail house rock, by himself. Now this is impressive supposedly because 9 guys is tough but 9 Jailhouse Rock guys is supposed to be impossible. But he did and his rep supposedly went as far as the west coast jails. A guy later on the street lasted 5 min with Mother Dear, and when he went into the joint he was like a legend just for lasting that long. So Mother Dear is like the Rickson Gracie of Jailhouse Rock lol.

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¹ Legends 1, 2, 4 and 7 are quoted from online message boards. Legends 3 and 5 are from email correspondence. Legend 6 is from a personal interview.
biography, but of what issues drive the narratives surrounding Mother Dear. What are the agendas of the folk group?

In the case under consideration, fear of rape is a universal source of anxiety among members of prison populations [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]. Rape lore commonly involves victimization by means of superior physical strength and fighting ability wielded by a homosexual predator. Figures such as Mother Dear exemplify this combination of traits. Throughout the body of narratives surrounding Mother Dear as the 52s master, one finds references to the following relevant traits:

**Invincibility**
In the passages above: Legend 1 characterizes Mother Dear as a killer; 2 as ‘unbeatable’, and 3 deals with his invincibility in its entirety.

**Viciousness**
Legend 1 says ‘when a new jack [new convict] come, if Mother Dear like him, that new jack had to freely give it up, or get ‘ROCK’ THE HARD WAY’.

2: ‘These 2 guys [Mother Dear and Mother Nature] were brothers and they both were gay. […] if you didn’t submit to their approach, they beat you to submission. I’m not talking about raping a guy. I’m talking about the guy had to do [sodomize] them.

7: ‘According to Kev, Mother Dear was tall, skinny and light skinned, with very, very long (yes, womanly) fingernails, which he would use viciously in his fights’.

**Predatory**
Legend 2: ‘a lot of “5 percenters” followed in Mother Dear’s footsteps and starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks’.

The label Mother Dear applied to such a character has an ironic impact that is deepened when the conventional usage of Mother Dear (also sometimes shortened to ‘Mu’ Dear’, or ‘Madea’) in African-American tradition is juxtaposed to the vicious predatory alleged founder of the 52s. The former came to general attention in the comic persona ‘Madea’ developed by American comedian Tyler Perry over a series of films. Perry asks:

But who is Madea and where did this character come from? Well, Madea isn’t an unfamiliar term in the black community in the south. Madea is a cross between two words, Mother, and Dearest. It’s particularly a southern term for grandmother. [Thomas 2005]
The Mother Dear of Southern tradition stands in diametric opposition to Perry’s gun toting, pot smoking, violent character and the gay Mother Dear.

The term Madea once stood for the strongest matriarchal figure in a Black family. Madea is a wife who rarely cusses and has a gentle touch. But she rules as a firm disciplinarian. Her stare can get a child under control and make a grown man weep. [Sellers, Jr. 2005]

SIMILAR FIGURES

When initiating the research on which this article is based, I believed that the case of Mother Dear and similar figures (e.g. Dead Arm Ro’) was unique to 52s/Jailhouse Rock. Subsequently, however, I discovered the following narratives unrelated to the 52s.

Boxing Betty, Legend 1
Boxing Betty could have taught men a thing or two. ‘Boxing Betty’ was one of the best fighters Don King ever saw. The promoter met her while she was in jail for manslaughter in the 1960s. ‘She could have been a world champ’, King recalled during his visit to South Africa. He had one particularly amusing tale about Betty, who fought in prison competitions. ‘Betty, whose pimp was half her size, was once approached in an ungentlemanly manner by a fellow inmate. So Boxing Betty warned him: ‘Do you want me to slip out of my womanhood and into my [at this point the transgender woman’s voice dropped from near-soprano to baritone] manhood and kick your ass?’ [Queer Day 2004]

Boxing Betty, Legend 2
Boxing Betty was a regular old dude, four dudes raped him in the shower at old [OTHER STATE PRISON] before they tore it down so he worked out and started lifting weights and came back five years later and raped and beat them up every single one of them, he got his get back, I was nine when this happened. He’s gay now, but he made them suck his dick; he’s considered a legend, he’s a cool person you would never know. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Boxing Betty, Legend 3
We used to have this one legend that this guy called Boxing Betty, a homo well-known. He used to box when they had the boxing program. He liked taking it both ways, and if he seen someone he liked that he wanted sex with, he’d beat them up and force them to fuck him in the ass. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Fort Knox
Got a big old dude down there who called Fort Knox, got real old been on state 28 or 29 years, real big dude, was a professional weightlifter or something, the thing is, he the girl, he’ll beat somebody up that he might like and while you laying there knocked out he going to get what he want. He’s pressing 300lbs but he like to suck your dick. If you don’t let him, he knock you out and suck you. You wake up and your pants on down around your knees and you got a big old knot on your head. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Brutus
There’s this guy named Brutus; he’s a really big guy supposed to be gay. He walked around with a weight belt on and told people ‘hey, you let me suck you off or I’m going to knock you out, and then he’d do it’. I met Brutus in 1990. He was a big guy. [Fleisher and Kleinert 2006]

Lick ‘em Lenny
There’s this guy they call Lick’em Lenny; he’s what they call a goop gobbler. He’ll knock them out and then take them [have sex with them]. I don’t know the guy’s name, that’s his nickname, but apparently he’s a known homosexual who likes young boys and will suck dick on these young guys. He’s some weirdo; he pays for cups of semen and will drink them. [Fleisher and Kleinert]

THE UNIQUENESS OF MOTHER DEAR

The central figures in the preceding legends share important similarities. Each is a homosexual convict who used violence (although not as exotic as Mother Dear’s 52s) to coerce sexual partners. Fort Knox, Lick’em Lenny, and Brutus are all passive homosexuals, as is Mother Dear in Legend 2. Boxing Betty, according to Betty Legend 3, ‘liked it both ways’. These accounts bear strong similarities to the Mother Dear narratives, and with one exception, most of them, as is the case with Mother Dear, give no explanations for their sexual preferences. There is no overtly stated motivation for their homosexuality except in the Betty 2 legend where the controlling motif is the revenge motive of a rape victim. This constitutes a distinct difference from Mother Dear, who is never put in a sexual situation that he did not control.

The names of the various anti-heroes are significant. The martial tools of Boxing Betty are apparent in his name. Brutus’ name is less likely to have been inspired by Shakespeare or Roman history than by the brutish bully of Popeye cartoons. Lick’em Lenny advertises his sexual inclinations. Fort Knox is more ambiguous, but the name may
be an effort to compare his invulnerability to that of the US Bullion Depository. As discussed previously, ironically bestowing the name Mother Dear on a vicious rapist juxtaposes notions of protector and predator.

In addition, Mother Dear legends are unique in containing a political motif. Introducing the 5% Nation of Islam into the folk biography of Mother Dear as in legends 2 and 6 contextualizes events in the racial politics of the 1960s and 1970s. It is perhaps significant that politically active and martially-aware hip-hop artists such as Wu Tang Clan have specifically referenced the 52s.

Finally, the Mother Dear tale ‘types’ uniquely allude to the importance of a physical aesthetic through their description of confrontations employing the 52s. As noted previously, significant elements of this aesthetic are described in the passage with which this article began, ones that appear repeatedly in practitioners’ discussions of the 52s, such as the signature forearm catch and kiss, the characterization of the fight as an exhibition, taunting and humiliating the opponent, and so on – all mark the performance dimension of the style. As Legend 3 states ‘Many Gods [male 5%ers] use to tell me this cat Mother Dear was so nice with the 52 style that he could catch a person jab or punch and kiss [the puncher’s fist] at the same time counterattack’. Ubiquitously, competent 52s fighters are depicted as maintaining composure and control while physically destroying an opponent, with the goal being to humiliate, to ‘dis’ him (i.e., disrespect him).

**CONCLUSION
SEX, POWER, MASTERY AND STYLE**

The concepts of control and respect are central to understanding not only Mother Dear but also have relevance in relation to our understanding of other characters and cases of prison rape as a social phenomenon. In a groundbreaking study, Joanne Mariner argues that prison rape is motivated not simply or primarily by sexual desire, but by a desire for dominance, power [2001]. She writes: ‘[R]ape is an expression of power. It unequivocally establishes the aggressor’s dominance, affirming his masculinity, strength and control at the expense of the victim’ [Mariner 2001: 96].

Beyond the general behavioral pattern of the prison rapist that typifies Mother Dear, further insights into his role as a folk hero may be provided by examination of the urban ‘Badman’ character in African-American folklore. The motivations of the Mother Dear character of prison lore also appears in the anti-heroes of the African-American tradition. These motivations are blatant in the sexuality and virility that permeate the fantasy realm of performance. One genre in which sexuality is a central theme is the ‘toast’. Toasts are long African-American street corner epics. Angela Nelson (2005) argues that these performances are the ancestors of contemporary ‘gangsta rap’. Both extoll misogyny, arrogant self-assertion, and violence. In this tradition, Stackolee is typical of the Badman hero, a figure in perpetual revolt who stands outside community norms. He is, like Mother Dear, a particularly urban figure from the lower echelons of city life, described as a world of crime, violent confrontations, and death [Abrahams 1962].

Stackolee

It was back in the time of nineteen hundred and two,
I had a fucked-up deck a cards and I didn’t know what to do.
My woman was leavin’, she was puttin’ me out in the cold.
I said, ‘Why you leavin’ me, baby?’ She said, ‘Our love has grown old.’
So she kept packin’ the bags, so I said, ‘Fuck it’, you know.
So I waded through water and I waded through mud and I came to this town called the Bucket of Blood.
And I asked the bartender for something to eat, he give me a dirty glass a water and a tough-assed piece a meat.
I said, ‘Bartender, bartender, don’t you know who I am?’
He said, ‘Frankly, my man, I don’t give a goddam’.
I said, ‘My name is Stackolee’. He said, ‘Oh, yes, I heard about you up this way, but I feed you hungry motherfuckers each and every day’.
‘Bout this time the poor bartender had gone to rest – I pumped six a my rockets [bullets] in his motherfucken chest.
A woman run out the back screamin’ real loud, said, ‘I know my son ain’t dead!’
I said, ‘You just check that hole in the ugly motherfucker’s head’.
She say ‘You may be bad, your name may be Stack, but you better not be here when Billy Lyons get back’.
So I walked around the room and I seen this trick, and we went upstairs and we started real soon.
Now me and this broad we started to tussle and I drove twelve inches a dick through her ass before she could move a muscle.
We went downstairs where we were before, we fucked on the table and all over the floor.
‘Bout that time you could hear the drop of a pin – that bad motherfucker Billy Lyons had just walked in.
He walked behind the counter, seen the bartender dead, he say, ‘Who put this hole in this ugly motherfucker’s head’.

The 52 Hand Blocks, Sexual Dominance, and Mother Dear as Archetype
Thomas A. Green
Say, 'Who can this man’s murderer be?'
One motherfucker say, 'You better speak soft, his name is Stackolee'.
He say, 'Stack, I’m gonna give you a chance to run before I draw my gun'.
Bitch jumped up and said, 'Billy, please'.
He shot that whore through both her knees.
A pimp eased up and turned out the lights and I had him dead in both my sights.
When the lights came back on poor Billy had gone to rest, I had pumped nine a my rockets in his motherfucken chest.
The next day about half-past ten
I was standin’ before the judge and twelve good other men.
They say, 'What can this man’s charges be?'
One sonofabitch say, 'Murder in the first degree'.

Another say, 'What can this man’s penalty be?'
One say, 'Hang him', another say, 'Give him gas'.
A snaggle-tooth bitch jumped up and say,
'Run that twister through his jivin’ ass!'
My woman jumped up and said, 'Let him go free, 'cause there ain’t nobody in the world can fuck like Stackolee'.
[Jackson 1974: 46–47]

Regarding Stackolee and similar figures, folklorist Bruce Jackson argues:

sexual relations in the toasts are invariably affectionless and usually affectless; the female exists as a device for exercise and articulation of male options, not as an integral member of a bilateral relationship. There is an apparent inconsistency too important to ignore: sexual conquest of the female is usually presented as being important, yet the object of the conquest is consistently denigrated. The object of conquest has significance only insofar as it is there to be conquered, not for any sequels to the conquest itself. One does not conquer the female to have sex; it is with sex [...] one negotiates, executes, and terminates the conquest. What remains is only an object as inferior as the protagonist insisted it was at the beginning, for all function is then denied it.

[Jackson 1974: 129]

Mother Dear of legends takes a similar attitude toward his sexual prey.
Note phrases such as: 'they beat you to submission'; 'starting knocking cats out in jail and taking they ass, using the 52 Blocks', 'if brother on the outside knew that you got punk, raped, they knew that you get no respect', 'urban community, if found out they got punk, that most likely got beat down bad'. All clearly suggest that a primary reward to the perpetrator for rape is subjugation and humiliation of the victim, not simply sexual satisfaction. Exercising power over another member of the prison population accretes social capital for the aggressor. Commonly this entails being put into a female role by a social ‘female’, but whether the victim is forced to play the active or passive role, he is rendered powerless and thus subordinate in the prevailing social hierarchy.

As Robertson asserts: 'The quest for dominance and control over other inmates – not sexual release – best explains male custodial rape. Prison sexual predators are typically heterosexual. Their victims, however, involuntarily assume female roles in the prison sexual system' [Robertson 2003]. If the toasts’ characterization of male-female relationships can serve as a gauge, domination by Mother Dear (a ‘female’) is the ultimate diss. Mother Dear, therefore, is motivated by more complex drives than sex. The desire to rise in the prison hierarchy through intimidation and domination by means of sex carries equal importance.

The preceding remarks grapple with contradictory issues that arise from a consideration of the 52 Hand Blocks. For example, while other fighting styles may be equally effective, much of the superiority of the 52s is attributed to the belief that it is, in the words of one resource person, ‘the “flyest” [most stylish] way of kicking ass’. The aesthetic dimension of the skills displayed by the highest level practitioners, such as Mother Dear, is an omnipresent motif in comments such as he ‘was so nice [polished/adept] with it’, and so on. An example of a ‘nice’ element would be the signature move of catching an opponent’s punch and kissing the fist before contemptuously throwing it back at the assailant. While this gesture may have only a hint of the homoeroticism central to the Mother Dear narratives, it places the opponent in a dominated relationship by means of an overtly sexual gesture. As such, it serves as a powerful ‘diss’. A consideration of similar features of the 52s may help to resolve the apparently contradictory nature of touting a homosexual who in the narratives above engages in the passive role and at least once is described as being as close to a woman in appearance as possible as the founder of an extraordinarily effective martial style.

When turning to the macrocosmic level of violent sex as a tool for asserting dominance in the penal system, these features of the 52s and the Mother Dear legends display an internal logic. The motif of the weaponization of sex has echoes in the ‘Badman toasts’ depicting characters like Stackolee of African-American folk tradition. What appears to be a cross-generic motif in vernacular martial practice and oral narrative calls for further investigation, as do other potential similarities among performance and martial culture in other populations.
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The 52 Hand Blocks, Sexual Dominance, and Mother Dear as Archetype

Thomas A. Green
This article analyzes the transformation of a modernized Japanese school of martial arts, *jujutsu* (柔術), also known as *jiu-jitsu*, *jujitsu* and/or *Kodokan judo*, into a Brazilian combat sport. In the 1930s, the Gracies, supported by a nationalist regime, launched a comprehensive process of jiu-jitsu reinvention that evolved into a local combat sport at the same time as the inauguration of the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937. This study argues that the Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the direct outcome of clashes pitting the Gracies and Japanese immigrants that occurred against a background of radical nationalism, violence and ideological polarization. The creation of a local jiu-jitsu encompassed a wide range of changes in techniques, philosophy and rituals borne from the clash between tradition and modernity.
Nationalism, Immigration and Identity
José Cairus

INTRODUCTION

Around World War I, a branch of a Scottish-cum-Rio de Janeiro family with genteel pretensions, joined a troupe of Japanese martial artists and adopted jujutsu (hereafter, jiu-jitsu) as part of their circus act. The surname of this family was Gracie. After having moderate success in the Amazon, they faced economic hardship in the 1920s upon their return to Rio de Janeiro. In the face of this, the Gracies sought to use their jiu-jitsu skills to meet the challenges posed by their failing social status during the transition from the ‘Old Republic’ to the Getúlio Vargas regime. Their trajectory might be taken to confirm the identification between the new regime and the emergent middle class, as suggested by Michael Conniff [1981]. However, the Gracies were not part of the emergent middle classes. Rather they can be said to fit better into Brian Owensby’s characterization of Brazilian society of the 1930s: this proposed a category of déclassé aristocrats, ‘descendants of traditional families struggling to adjust to the challenges and uncertainties of an increasingly competitive and diversified social order that had eroded the social hierarchy of mid-nineteenth century slave society’ [Owensby 1999: 45–46]. Nonetheless, the Gracies’ trajectory certainly shows that, in modern Brazil, white or light-skinned individuals from the ranks of once elite groups still enjoyed privileges under the new regime.

This context played a crucial role in the creation of what is today widely known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ), an internationally successful, rapidly globalizing martial art and combat sport, which was pioneered and promoted by the Gracie family throughout the twentieth century. In the twenty first century, the Gracies are still closely – almost indelibly – associated with BJJ. Yet remarkably little scholarly research has been carried out into the socio-cultural and political context of its historical formation. This article seeks to redress this balance.

In the early 1930s the Gracies used their martial arts skills to replenish their cultural capital and regain social status. They did this by introducing the practice of jiu-jitsu into the newly created paramilitary gendarmerie, known as Policía Especial (Special Police). The provisional government, headed by Getúlio Vargas, had created the Special Police (Policía Especial) in 1932 as a branch of Rio’s police department as part of comprehensive reform which restructured the state security apparatus [Vargas 1938: 34-35]. The raison d’être of this Fascist-inspired unit was ousting Getúlio Vargas’ representative in São Paulo. The casus belli was the new regime’s failure to comply with the demands of São Paulo’s oligarchies for constitutional rule [Burns 1993: 351-352]. Also in 1932, a coalition of landowners and industrialists politically sidelined by the coup d’état in 1930, deposed Varga’s interventor (appointed state governor) and declared war on the authoritarian regime. After nearly three months of military engagements, federal armed forces defeated São Paulo’s troops, which were made up of state militias and volunteers. In order to avoid any repetition of such an event, the new regime organized storm trooper squads, fully devoted to Getúlio Vargas, whose primary mission was to protect the regime [Bonelli 2003: 14]. Physical prowess and martial arts skills were the most important requirements and considerations when it came to drafting new recruits, and the unit worked in combination with the political police (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social –D.O.P.S.). Throughout their existence, both forces were deadly efficient and infamously identified with the more repressive facet of Vargas’ authoritarian regime.

As a result of their insertion into Getúlio Vargas’ security apparatus, the Gracies enjoyed protection under the new regime. In this article, I analyze how they launched a process of reinventing Japanese jiu-jitsu within a context of growing nationalism and the active construction of national identity, most notably during the implementation of the Estado Novo dictatorship after 1937.

Strongly supported by the regime, the Gracies ran their jiu-jitsu operations in Rio de Janeiro only a few blocks from the presidential palace. By contrast, rival martial artists settled in the epicenter of Japanese immigration, 400 kilometers away, in São Paulo. The rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese martial artists reflected the existence of two competing projects for modern Brazil. The Gracies came to represent the nationalist alliance between Rio’s old elite and the new power holders hailing from oligarchies established in peripheral Brazil – an alliance that was not without xenophobic overtones. Conversely, the Japanese martial artists symbolized São Paulo’s agro-industrial elite option for immigration and multiculturalism.

The dynamic of the rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese fighters reveals the ambiguities within in the discourses just mentioned. The Navy was the branch of the military that had pioneered the practice of jiu-jitsu, and it sponsored some of the best Japanese martial artists in Brazil during the 1930s. At the same time, the Navy traditionally recruited officers of genteel background. In this context, their antagonism toward the Gracies reveals an inter-elite dispute within the bureaucratic apparatus created by the new regime [Beattie 2004: 91]. Accordingly, in this article, I analyze the genesis of Brazilian jiu-jitsu using two conceptual frameworks. For, the creation of a Brazilian national identity took place, on the one hand, in a context of growing foreign immigration and, on the other, in terms of a nationalist influence [Lesser 1999]. During the 1930s, the Gracies found themselves in a quasi-Hobbesian state of war against all challengers. When fighting Brazilian wrestlers, the Gracies were simply seeking to enhance their status and prestige within the new political establishment. But when fighting the Japanese, they were in a more complicated way becoming figures of national identity and simultaneously representatives a distinct local fighting style.

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1 In 1924, the Brazilian government created the D.O.P.S. (Departamento de Ordem Política e Social) Department of Political and Social Order.
The Gracies created a local jiu-jitsu culture by self-consciously refusing to abide by the technical, philosophical and cultural aspects of the Japanese matrix. As a result, they laid the foundations of the future hybrid that would come to be known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu. The transformation of Japanese jiu-jitsu encompassed a wide range of changes concerning techniques, philosophy, and rituals. To approach these, I employ Arjun Appadurai’s approach to understanding the acculturation of British cricket in India. Appadurai argued that through a binary transformation involving ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ forms, British cricket underwent a process of indigenization in colonial India. Appadurai writes:

Hard cultural forms are those that come with a set of links between value, meaning, and embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform. Soft cultural forms, by contrast, permit relatively easy separation of embodied performance from meaning and value, and relatively successful transformation at each level [Appadurai 1996: 90]

To grasp what is meant by the ‘hard’ forms of embodied practice, a brief explanation of technical aspects is necessary. Japanese immigration had direct influence on jiu-jitsu style as reinvented by the Gracies. Since the initial bouts in 1930 between Carlos Gracie and Geo Omori in São Paulo, what became clear was the Japanese martial artists’ technical superiority in standing techniques (Nage-Waza). Yet their very specialization in standing techniques led the Japanese fighters to gradually neglect ground combat (Ne-Waza). The Gracies then filled the technical gap by focusing their jiu-jitsu practice almost exclusively on ground combat. Ultimately, while keeping the techniques in their original form, they worked out a ground combat style based on a defensive strategy. Simultaneously, the Gracies sought to transform jiu-jitsu’s ‘soft’ forms by rapidly abolishing Japanese bowing (rei-ho), ignoring Kodokan judo’s belt rankings and Japanese rules governing the fights.

ROUND 1: A ‘FIGHT OF HONOR’,
GEORGE GRATIE VERSUS YANO TAKEO

In 1934, the newspaper Jornal dos Sports announced Yano Takeo’s arrival in Rio de Janeiro:

A new phenomenon in our rings: The sympathetic and humble Japanese Takeo Yano came to our office accompanied by Commander Luis Souto, director of the Navy Sports League. This young Japanese man settled in Brazil three years ago and has a record of 200 fights since the beginning of his martial arts career in Japan. In Brazil, he fought a police sergeant weighing 185 pounds (Yano weighs 154 pounds). In the state of Pará (Amazon) he taught jiu-jitsu to the police forces and to the Navy officers as Count Koma’s assistant. Currently, living in Rio de Janeiro, he is teaching classes to 20 Navy cadets. Yano will challenge George Gracie soon.

Figure 1: Yano Takeo. Source: Jornal dos Sports, 1934
After Mayeda Mitsuyo, Yano arguably held the best martial arts pedigree in Brazil. The article above hinted at the existence of animosity between the Gracies and jiu-jitsu practitioners in the Navy. The Navy Sports League, founded during World War I, promoted sports and nationalism, and in the 1930s recruited Japanese instructors to teach jiu-jitsu and swimming. Once again, although the local lineages of martial artists originated in the Amazon, they competed fiercely for Mayeda’s legacy. This time, however, the Gracies were facing their Japanese rivals with backing from the Brazilian Navy, which pioneered the practice of Japanese jiu-jitsu in the early twentieth century.

Yano eventually challenged the Gracies to ‘a fight for honor’. After démarches in which tempers flared, Yano and George Gracie fought a 100-minute bout. This was dominated by Yano, who threw the Brazilian twenty-six times. Despite his ample technical dominance, the match ended in a tie according to the agreed rules. Afterwards, Yano dismissed rumors of deliberately holding back during the fight. Instead, he declared that his failure to win was due to George’s defensive strategy and because the local rules were different than those enforced by Kodokan school in Japan.

**ROUND 2: JIU-JITSU, FOOTBALL AND DICTATORSHIP RIO DE JANEIRO, 1937**

Under Getúlio Vargas’ leadership, the regime ruling Brazil since the coup d’état in 1930 became a full-fledged dictatorship in 1937. This was known as the Estado Novo – the New State. It was a period of the radicalization of Brazilian nationalism in a quintessentially xenophobic form, expressed in terms of an alleged foreign threat. Throughout the 1930s, Japanese immigration was often at the center of a national debate dividing the Brazilian elite. Anti-Japanese groups sought to justify their xenophobia claiming that the ‘yellow peril’ were unassimilable and a threat to the idea of a homogenous national identity. Against this background, a rivalry developed between the Gracies in Rio de Janeiro and the Ono brothers in São Paulo.

In 1937, George Gracie claimed that his younger brother, Hélio, had previously fought a 2-2 draw with Ono Yasuichi. Now George would have his shot against Ono Naohi. The referees for the bout held in Rio were two Special Police officers, one of whom was the police commandant, Lieutenant Euzébio de Queiroz. Ono Naohi threw George Gracie harshly several times, tossed him out of the ring and then choked him into submission. This devastating loss before their patrons certainly damaged the Gracies’ reputation and demanded a quick and adequate response.

Immediately thereafter, the promoters rapidly scheduled a rematch to take place at the Brazil Stadium in Rio de Janeiro. Before a packed arena, George finished off Ono Naochi in the sixth round with a decisive arm bar that constituted revenge and restored the Gracies’ honor. The next day’s newspapers headlined: Football is no longer the only sport attracting large audiences. The analogy with football was deliberate, since Mário Filho, intellectual and owner of the *Jornal dos Sports*, enthusiastically promoted a national identity associated with a Brazilian style of football. Heightening the nationalist fervor, the Brazilian-owned movie studio Cinédia screen the presentation of ‘the first jiu-jitsu match ever filmed in Brazil’.

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7 The Navy Sports League was founded on November 25 1916.

8 ‘Ono é um lutador extraordinário! *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, November 27 1935, 3. Commander Luis Filipe de Filgueira Souto was among the 333 sailors killed in the sinking of the battleship ‘Bahia’ on July 4 1945. The warship was sunk by accident during an artillery exercise off Brazil’s northeastern coast.

9 ‘Yano Desafia Hélio Gracie Para Uma Luta De Honra’, *Jornal dos Sports*, December 20 1934, 3.

10 ‘George Gracie e Yano empatam após 100 Minutos de ação’, *Ring*, Rio de Janeiro, October 5 1935, 3.


15 The ‘Estádio Brasil’ (Brazil Stadium) was a 3,600 square feet-multifunction arena built in 1935 near Rio’s downtown at the ‘Feira Internacional de Amostras’ fairgrounds (Sample International Fair).

16 George Gracie venceu no sexto round com um armlock: ‘ já não se pode dizer que o football é o único esporte que atraí o grande público’, *Jornal dos Sports*, Rio de Janeiro, October 3 1937, 6.

17 Ibid.
THE GRACIES VERSUS THE JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTISTS: FIGHTING FOR JIU-JITSU’S SUPREMACY

As James C. Scott affirmed, the new regime sought ‘to remake society in its own image’ [Scott 1998: 97]. In undertaking this task, the government created agencies to organize, regulate and control sports in general and combat sports in particular. Rio de Janeiro’s Municipal Boxing Commission, for example, was organized in 1933 and was responsible for a variety of martial arts. Upon the arrival of the new regime, elements within both the military and the police became obsessed with ideas stemming from neo-Lamarckian eugenics that placed strong emphasis on improvement of living conditions through the practice of sports [Stepan 1991: 92]. Thus, police or military officers usually led the state agencies that governed combat sports.

At the same time as measures that established state control over combat sports, there was growing Japanese immigration between 1925 and 1935 that brought scores of martial artists to São Paulo. The account of an immigrant named Yanagimori Masaru is particularly noteworthy. In 1936, he was a fifteen-year old martial artist who embarked on a ship bound for Brazil. The ‘Buenos Aires Maru’ regularly transported Japanese immigrants and was equipped with a twenty-eight mat dojo that held a judo tournament during the forty day trip. According to Yanagimori Masaru, ten percent of the passengers were martial arts practitioners, with one-fourth of these being black belts. Such figures indicate a significant number of martial artists arriving to Brazil, as immigrants traveling on the ‘Buenos Aires Maru’ represented ten per cent of the all Japanese arrivals in 1936 [Arai 2003].

Confrontations between the Gracies in Rio de Janeiro and the Japanese black belts were probably inevitable even though the latter predominantly settled in São Paulo. The early 1930s, Hélio and George Gracie fought their first bouts against new Japanese immigrants. Both Gracies achieved draws in their respective fights, both against Namiki and the old Gracie acquaintance, Geo Omori. Towards the mid 1930s, Japanese immigrants with outstanding martial arts skills landed in Rio de Janeiro, some of them supported by the Gracies’ antagonists in the military.

Evidence of the growing tension between the Gracies and the Boxing Commission can be seen in the fact that they had their licenses to participate in public bouts suspended twice in 1934. On the first occasion, prior to the fight between Hélio and a Japanese named Myako, Carlos Gracie flatly rejected the appointed referee, who was instead replaced by the Gracies’ patron, Special Police chief Lieutenant Euzébio de Queiroz. Next, Carlos made an unusual request – for the use of sleeveless jiu-jitsu uniforms. This was apparently in an effort to make the application of arm bars by the Japanese more difficult. Lastly, after Hélio’s victory over Myako, the Boxing Commission suspended Carlos from participating in combat sports due to his unruly behavior during the bouts and persistent complaints. The other Gracie, George, also had his share of controversy with the commission. In 1934, he once entered the ring but inexplicably refused to fight the Brazilian wrestler Orlando Ámérico da Silva (nicknamed Dudu). Before an astonished audience and members of the Boxing Commission, the police escorted George away and placed him in custody.

The Boxing Commission sought to set limits, draft regulations, and create weight divisions and rules, all in order to decrease the level of violence in no-holds-barred bouts. Such measures infuriated the Gracies, whose martial-art marketing sought largely to create the image of ‘David and Goliath’ performances. The creation of weight divisions mitigated the effects of their psychological game. Moreover, the adoption of international wrestling rules deprived them of many of the chances inherent to fights with barely any rules. For instance, the referees of the Boxing Commission were instructed to apply international wrestling rules in which points were gained by pinning fighters on their backs. This regulation posed a major setback for the Gracies since they were often likely to be pinned down for a while when fighting against larger and heavier wrestlers.

The jiu-jitsu routine that Carlos Gracie learned from Mayeda Mitsuyo lacked philosophical aspects, hierarchy and respect for the rules otherwise found elsewhere in the Japanese tradition. This helped the Gracies replace Kodokan judo’s ‘soft’ forms of orthodox and to produce a local version of the sport. A similar situation occurred in the creation of creole style of football (fútbol criollo) in Argentina where the British sought to transmit to local footballers their sporting ethics [Archetti 1991: 49]. However, the Argentineans reinvented football under their own cultural terms. In fact, Argentinean, Uruguayan and Brazilian football players over time developed their own interpretation of what the British defined as ‘fair play’. Brazilians responded by resorting to a local codification known in Portuguese as catimba. This colloquial Afro-Portuguese word catimba corresponds to the Spanish term picadía criolla, which means ‘craftiness’ or ‘trickery’. Each refers to dissimulation or astute trickery used to keep an adversary off balance through behavior unexpectedly contrary to the norms.

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19 'Brilhante vitória de Hélio Gracie sobre Myako.' Jornal dos Sports, Rio de Janeiro, June 24 1934, 6.

20 George, after signing a contract and agreeing to the rules, refused to fight under any rule. ‘George Gracie fugiu ao combate com Dudu.’ Jornal dos Sports, Rio de Janeiro, November 4 1934, 6.

The Gracies’ adamant refusal to abide by Kodokan rules and to resist the ones enforced by the Boxing Commission is key to understanding how they survived the early confrontations with Japanese martial artists while creating a local jiu-jitsu style. It is noteworthy that modern rules enforced both in Japan and in Brazil had nationalistic and even militaristic undertones. Kodokan judo rules, for example, resurrected old warrior codes of Japanese Bushido by incorporating the idea of ‘sudden death’, which proclaimed as victorious the one able to apply a clean (‘perfect’) throw. In Brazil, the military, which was in charge of combat sports, sought to standardize loosely organized rules in order to regulate violence and transform unruly performances into modern sport.

If the Gracies accepted Japanese rules, they would stand no chance of victory against skilled Japanese throwers. Similarly, adopting the new rules that determined victory by points established by the military that controlled the Boxing Commission would turn draws into defeats. This is clear when one analyzes the fights in which the Japanese martial artists threw and dominated the Gracies. One should bear in mind that inconclusive draws allowed the Gracies to keep their aura of invincibility intact, which was a valuable asset in times of nationalism.

After the Gracies’ fight with Takeo Yano, as described in the beginning of this article, other Japanese immigrants based in São Paulo came to Rio determined to purge the local jiu-jitsu’s heresy. Yassuiti, another member of the Ono family supported by the Navy challenged Hélio Gracie.22

In a bitter exchange of words prior to the fight, Carlos Gracie acknowledged the hostile Navy officer’s past apprenticeship under Mayeda Mitsuyo in the Amazon. Yet training under the same jiu-jitsu master made them rivals rather than friends. Furthermore, in this exchange Commander Souto emphasized that Ono was even better than Yano, and that Hélio Gracie thus stood no chance.23 In response, instead of offering his habitual bellicose remarks, Carlos was somewhat tactful. While acknowledging ‘Commander Souto’s profound jiu-jitsu knowledge’, Carlos affirmed that ‘Hélio had no fear and will win’.24 Ono himself decided to provoke the Gracies and declared that Hélio would not survive the first round and challenged all the Gracies to fight him in one night.25 The bout ended in a draw, not very differently from George’s previous match with Yano. According to the Jornal dos Sports, Hélio’s strong defensive strategy held off Ono’s aggressive actions. Carlos, acknowledging the danger posed by Ono, sought to disturb the latter and intimidate the referee. For this, the Boxing Commission, once again, suspended him from coaching for six months.26

The first round of fights between the Gracies and skilled Japanese martial artists such as Yano and Ono came to a stalemate although the Gracies managed to survive their first real test against mainstream jiu-jitsu. The political background behind the matches was particularly

![Figure 2: 'Ono is an outstanding fighter: Captain Luis Souto, Count Koma’s student'. Source: Jornal dos Sports, 1935.](image-url)
significant. A political crisis marked by violent clashes broke out on November 23, 1935, in some northeastern states and Rio de Janeiro. A Communist revolt rocked the fragile constitutional arrangement, and Getúlio Vargas used this as an excuse to impose a dictatorship in 1937 [Hilton 1991: 73]. Repressing communism was the baptême du feu for the Special Police in which the Gracies were instructors. Through this recently created gendarmerie the state unleashed repression in full swing [Scaramuzza 1981: 15–22].

Against this background, Hélio and Ono Naochi finally had a showdown. Ono slammed Gracie to the ground twenty-seven times and, even more surprisingly, the latter avoided ground combat, narrowly escaping defeat. By declaring a draw, the referee ignored the new jiu-jitsu rules that had recently been adopted by the Brazilian Boxing Federation. The new rules aimed to introduce a scoring system of points similar to those used in boxing matches. Under these regulations, Ono was the winner, but the invisible hand of the establishment saved the Gracies. At the end, the event organizers, perhaps trying to minimize public embarrassment, awarded Ono a gold medal for his contribution to martial arts practice.

The Ono brothers in São Paulo, however, were not satisfied with their previous bouts against the Gracies. Yasuichi challenged George Gracie and one newspaper headline declared: ‘Jiu-jitsu Supremacy in Brazil will be decided today! Who will win? The Japanese Ono or the Brazilian Gracie?’ After a very close match, the referee disqualified Ono for punching George unlawfully.

The tension around these matches seemed to take its toll on the Japanese fighter. Finally, Yasuichi’s younger brother, Naochi, came forward and challenged George. After a tough six-round fight, George defeated Naochi by points upon the application of the long-awaited new rules enforced by the referee from the Special Police.

By the end of 1937, at the launch of the Estado Novo, Yano declared: ‘only a Japanese martial artist can hold the title of best jiu-jitsu fighter.'
in Brazil. This was a bold statement, issued under a full-fledged dictatorship with xenophobic overtones. Yet Yano had the support from the Brazilian Navy, something that may have encouraged him to display his ‘Japaneseness’ in such tense times.

The turning point in the creation of a Brazilian jiu-jitsu were the fights pitting the Gracies against Japanese immigrants. After years struggling in the business of combat sports, at the beginning of the Estado Novo the Gracies managed to attract sizable audiences, capture media attention and obtain state support only comparable with football spectacles. In any event, the rivalry between the Gracies and the Japanese raged on when the Estado Novo was tightening its grip on every aspect of Brazilian life.

Within this wave of nationalism, George and Yano fought two important bouts, in Rio and Belo Horizonte respectively. In the first, George won by finishing Yano with a foot lock, evincing the Gracies growing specialization in ground combat. Prior to the second bout, however, the contenders made a peculiar bet in which Yano promised to throw George twenty times during the fight. If he failed, he would pay George a certain amount of cash for each failed throw. Yano accomplished his goal by throwing George exactly twenty times and won the bout on points.

By this stage, the differences between the styles were very clear. The Gracies relied on a defensive ground strategy based on a scissors-like position (do-o sae) to compensate for the Japanese superiority in throwing techniques. As such, the Gracies had developed their jiu-jitsu beyond the model of ‘soft forms’ – i.e., purely cultural adaptations – proposed by Arjun Appadurai.

Ultimately, the emphasis on ground combat was primarily a survival strategy and not the expression of a deliberate aim to create a ‘Brazilian’ jiu-jitsu style. Even so, the Gracies’ agency was an important factor in the invention of ‘Brazilian’ jiu-jitsu. The Gracies devised it as a defensive style, but they made it offensive through the application of chokes and joint-locks from the bottom position.

Figure 4: Osae-komi waza (pin down technique). Kodokan judo rules give the victory to those able to pin down their opponent for thirty seconds. By contrast, the Gracies adopted the rule in which victory only could be achieved by submission (surrender or tapping out). Source: Judo Information, 2011.

Figure 5: Nage-Waza (throwing techniques). According to Kodokan rules, a ‘perfect’ (clear) throw ends the fight according to the concept of ‘sudden death’ (knock-out). Source: Judo Information, 2011.

Figure 6: The ‘guard’ (do-osae) position hallmarkd the Brazilian jiu-jitsu by emphasizing ground combat.

33 ‘Yano esta certo de que derrotará George Gracie: japonês declara que só um japonês poderá deter a supremacia do jiu-jitsu’ Jornal dos Sports, Rio de Janeiro, August 31 1938, 4.

34 Getúlio Vargas’ coup d’état on September 10 1937 made the regime a full-fledged dictatorship.

35 ‘Yano e George mais uma vez frente a frente: uma aposta original para o grande choque de sábado’ Jornal dos Sports, Rio de Janeiro, September 22 1938, 2.


PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, POLITICS AND THE GRACIES’ PATRIARCHY

Participation in public performances against the Japanese was essential to the development of the Gracies’ ‘Brazilian’ jiu-jitsu. These activities, combined with others undertaken in their dojo, helped to consolidate their prestige and created a strong ethos that linked them with local society. Public gatherings displaying beautiful bodies, encouraging the practice of sports and promoting nationalism marked this period. Connections between sports, eugenics, nationalism, and militarism were the norm [Stepan 1991: 162–170]. Yet the transplanting of jiu-jitsu to particular elitist urban spaces and within a larger cultural concept was a specifically Gracie innovation. In 1936, they promoted jiu-jitsu tournaments and staged public demonstrations with the participation of ‘the best individuals of our society’.40

The presentations held on Copacabana Beach were a cultural innovation at a time when urban expansion sprawled along Rio’s southern beaches. The construction of the Copacabana Palace Hotel in 1923 had constituted a watershed for this previously peripheral neighborhood. It introduced fashionable forms of seaside recreation imported from contemporary Europe [Conniff 1981: 28–29]. The Jornal dos Sports enthusiastically reported in 1936: ‘Jiu-jitsu on Copacabana Beach: Splendor and Physical Prowess’.41 Beach culture was a new aspect of upper-class lifestyle sponsored by the Jornal dos Sports and the beginning of an instrumental relationship linking bodies in swimsuits to ones wrapped in jiu-jitsu gis.42

42 Roberto Marinho and Mário Filho bought the Jornal dos Sports. The former also owned the newspaper O Globo which became Brazil’s most powerful media empire in the second half of the twentieth century.
Along with scores of Brazilians, the Gracies found themselves caught in the middle of a fierce ideological competition in the 1930s. Modernist movements gained momentum in São Paulo during the 1920s and soon split into divergent ideological currents [Bethell 1996: 21–22]. The Ação Integralista Brasileira (A.I.B.) became during the 1930s the first mass-based political party organized in Brazil. Moreover, in the 1930s, international political polarization spilled over into the political arena in Brazil as communists and integralistas battled for hearts, minds, and power. The Integralist Party rapidly expanded in number and influence, winning over people from a wide array of social backgrounds and with different interpretations of nationalism. Furthermore, the slogan ‘God, Fatherland, and Family’, the aesthetics of their green shirts, the performance of lavish parades and their idiosyncratic salute: ‘Anauê!’ would be highly appealing to those seeking social insertion in the new order [Costa and Labriola 1999: 174].

After helping to crush the ‘Communist Insurrection’ in 1935, and upon the inauguration of the Estado Novo two years later, the integralists saw no hurdles between them and political power. Yet when it came time to divide the political spoils, Getúlio Vargas had his own plans, which did not include the integralists. The latter, frustrated and determined to settle a score with an ungrateful partner, stormed the presidential residence in 1938. The ill-planned and poorly implemented raid concluded as a grotesque episode [Levine 1998: 54]. The fate of the Estado Novo hung in the balance during the five-hour skirmish in which Vargas, his family, a handful of marines and Special Police troopers held off the rebels until lethargic support arrived from security forces [Peixoto 1960: 93].

Once the putsch attempt failed, the regime unleashed its security apparatus to punish the unruly integralists. Repression by political police (D.O.P.S) included raids and the seizing of documents from political committees throughout the country. In the party office in the then-bucolic Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Ipanema, the dossier that was found indicated that the party was a social patchwork. The long list of supporters included descendants of aristocratic families, the nouveau riche, intellectuals, civil servants, blue-collar workers, enlisted men, and housewives, displaying a remarkable political solidarity. On the party membership list, the name ‘Hélio Gracie’ showed up.

Of the three Gracie brothers who became instrumental in creating the Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos, George and Hélio, the latter was the only one who displayed open support for Integralism. In assessing Hélio’s affiliation to radical ideologies one is tempted to affirm that he was simply swept up in a strong political trend, but in some ways his support for this Brazilian version of fascism was predictable. In addition, the party placed a premium on youth, virility and aggressive manliness [Deutsch 1999: 282–283]. Hélio’s bellicose persona and past transgressions made his affiliation with the ‘green shirts’ unsurprising.

It is unknown whether Hélio suffered any reprisals in the repressive response to the coup attempt. It is likely that he was able to remain untouched, along with the majority of party members. In general, the backlash against the integralists was mild, especially when compared to the repression suffered by the communists in 1935 [Levine 1995: 54]. The repressive machine, however, carefully maintained the records of Hélio’s affair with the ‘green shirts’.

46 The movement led by Plínio Salgado branched off the modernist movement moving from aesthetics to political nationalism. Besides nationalism, Plínio Salgado brought to his movement traditional Catholicism, refreshed by the ongoing religious revivalism in Rio de Janeiro. He later founded Brazil’s ‘Integralist Party’.
47 In 1922, communists founded the Partido Comunista Brasileiro P.C.B. (Brazilian Communist Party) and in 1932, integralistas founded the Ação Integralista Brasileira, A.I.B. (Brazilian Integralist Action).
48 Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. DOPS/RJ – Dossiê das Relações de Votantes nos Diversos Nucleos. 31 de maio 1937, Fundo: Divisão de Polícia Política e Social.
The local jiu-jitsu invented by the Gracies continued to mold its soft forms on their image, against a backdrop of rapid social changes. A few months after the failed coup, a young woman walked into the Gracie dojo and asked for jiu-jitsu lessons to learn how to deal with her husband’s outbursts of violence. She explained that her husband was usually an ‘adorable man’, but prone to become physically abusive whenever he lost his temper. Since this rogue behavior was culturally tolerated as part of the routine violence faced by many women, the beleaguered housewife decided to resort to jiu-jitsu to combat machismo with the help of the Gracies [Hautzinger 2007: 34–35]. Carlos Gracie, assuming the role of female protector, not only taught her some jiu-jitsu techniques, but also professorially instructed her: ‘Do you want to solve your conjugal troubles? Put an arm bar on your husband’. This was the Gracies’ formula for responding to domestic violence.

Women’s rights made significant advances in the early stages of Getúlio Vargas’ rule. The regime initially promoted women’s suffrage and appointed female officials to high-profile positions, as well as introducing other improvements for middle- and upper-class women. Despite these achievements, the inauguration of the Estado Novo dictatorship in 1937 halted these advances and reinforced male domination [Hahner 1990: 177–179]. In this episode, Carlos gradually revealed his persona as a ‘cordial’ patriarch [Rocha 2004: 299]. ‘Brazilian cordiality’ is a phrase coined by historian Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda. It evokes the fact that since the colonial period foreigners have often portrayed Brazilians as overtly sincere, hospitable and generous. Buarque de Hollanda defined ‘Brazilian cordiality’ as a pattern developed in rural and patriarchal settings. Yet it does not engender social solidarity beyond the individual’s immediate circle. This behavior allowed Carlos Gracie to mitigate aspects of traditional behavior without giving up his patriarchal position.

In his trajectory to become the Gracies’ patriarch, in 1938 Carlos introduced his first-born son and successor through a newspaper article entitled ‘I want to be a champion too!’ Pictures depicted the five-year-old Eduardo Gracie, representing the second generation of this martial arts clan in the making, wearing a jiu-jitsu gi and performing moves with Carlos. Later, Carlos (claiming to be under spirit possession) changed the child’s name to ‘Carlson’ [Gracie 2008: 115].
was the offspring of Carlos’ relationship with Carmen, a dark-skinned woman of humble origins. This was a transgression of the unwritten codes that would deem a woman like Carmen to be an ‘unfit’ partner for Carlos, considering his family background.

However, Carlos claimed to follow an esoteric practice that regarded sexual discharge as ‘waste’ if not for bearing offspring [Urban 2006: 7]. He allegedly partnered women solely for the sake of procreation. Whether his reasons were the result of his esoteric beliefs or of patriarchal values, in order to enforce his procreation ideas, he tended to engage with poor females from lower social strata in sexual liaisons. In Brazil, the imbrication of race, class and gender explain why Carlos invariably resorted to dark-skinned female partners to carry out his reproductive strategies [Levine and Meihi 1995: 141]. Thereafter, Carlos would attribute his physical prowess, longevity and numerous progeny to his dietary habits combined with sexual restraint.

Completing the pillars underpinning Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos Gracie became increasingly involved with esoteric practices and adopted a vegetarian diet through his acquaintance with Oscar Santa Maria Pereira. In the early 1930s, alongside his trajectory in professional jiu-jitsu, Carlos met Oscar Santa Maria Pereira who was an employee in the Banco do Brasil, unmarried, and of humble Spanish background. The latter became Carlos’ student, confirming the enduring corporatist liaisons between the Gracies and that financial institution. Santa Maria, like others in this emergent, white middle class milieu, used his professional occupation to achieve social status through intellectual achievement and lavish sporting activities in organizations, such as the Associação Atlética Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil’s Athletic Association) [Owensby 1999: 53]. He adhered to esoteric religious denominations as a trendy religious alternative to traditional and conservative Catholicism.

In Brazil, spiritualism gained momentum along with modernization and became a class-based religious practice. This was strongly identified with white middle class sectors as a social and racial counter point to the Afro-Brazilian religions identified with by the lower social strata [Brown 1994: 8–14]. Santa Maria was a member of Rosicrucian Order, an esoteric semi-Christian sect [Lewis 1999: 110–111]. This affiliation, however, branched off into different organizations, like the one founded by the German-born Arnold Krumm-Heller, an adventurous physician who fought in the Mexican Revolution, founded an esoteric church there and later traveled throughout South America. In the early 1930s, he opened a branch of the Ancient Rosicrucian Fraternity in Rio de Janeiro of which Santa Maria and Carlos Gracie became affiliates [Dawson 2007: 55]. The partnership between Carlos Gracie and Santa Maria thrived over the years with the former gradually rising from the role of disciple to become the latter’s jiu-jitsu master and guru.

Lastly, completing the group of practices supporting Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Carlos Gracie adopted and prescribed a vegetarian diet later known as the ‘Gracie Diet’. Although he claimed authorship of the diet, it was the brainchild of Argentinean physician Juan Esteve Dulin who lived and lectured in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1920s. He traveled extensively in search of centenarian individuals to study their habits and gather evidence to produce an ideal type of diet [Dulin 1949]. As a result, a vegetarian diet became one of the backbones of Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Approaching the 1940s, after passing an entire decade deeply involved with jiu-jitsu, the Gracies developed other interests. Carlos became increasingly involved in a real estate business with his successful associate Oscar de Santa Maria, and decided to move to the northeastern state of Ceará. Santa Maria, meanwhile, rose steadily within the Banco do Brasil, which certainly opened opportunities for their partnership to conduct profitable business operations. Money matters, however, were not Carlos’ only concern; he also took seriously his role as a spiritualist guru, surrounded by a small circle of followers.

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Figure 11: ‘I want to be a champion too!’ Eduardo, later renamed as ‘Carlson’, was a Carlos Gracie’s first-born child in his clan of Brazilian jiu-jitsu’s fighters. Source: O Globo Sportivo, 1938.

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Spiritual guidance ruled over every aspect of his life. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether he decided to move for practical reasons or whether he was motivated by spiritual inspiration. Whatever the reasons, he settled along with his five children in what became the most sensitive region of Brazil during wartime. In 1942, Brazil declared war on the Axis powers. The *casus belli* was the sinking of Brazilian ships by German U-boats off the coast of northeastern Brazil. When the war broke out, Carlos was living in the coastal city of Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará State.

During the war, the Estado Novo dictatorship tightened its grip by imposing harsh censorship and controlling mail service and telegraphic communications. The steady flow of correspondence between Carlos Gracie and Oscar de Santa Maria raised the suspicion of local authorities in Ceará. Carlos was seen as an outsider exchanging lengthy correspondence in cryptographic language. The political police in Rio de Janeiro had been informed by Ceará state police that Carlos Gracie – a former jiu-jitsu fighter and former member of the integralist militia – was currently living in Fortaleza. The local police reported that Carlos was exchanging letters, sent by an accountant, addressed to a high-ranking employee of the Banco do Brasil. This accountant had connections with Branca Botelho, the wife of the Swedish consul in Rio de Janeiro, and mistress of a certain German citizen named Osborne who was currently being detained for espionage. Such wartime paranoia was not unusual. Hélio's association with Integralism, the peculiar content of the letters, and an overzealous police officer in a backwater coastal town swarmed by German U-boats, combined to produce a fantastic story.

Among other things, the correspondence dealt with family affairs in which Santa Maria looked after Carlos' children [Gracie 2008: 207–208]. Other than this, they dealt with spiritual, dietary and business matters about which Carlos advised his small circle of followers. He claimed to receive advice in worldly matters through his shamanic connection with a native Peruvian spirit named Egídio Lasjovino. The nationality of Carlos' spiritual guide, as well as the adoption of the diet of the Argentinean physician, leads one to speculate about the actual mentor-role of Santa Maria over Carlos. In both cases, the Spanish language may have been instrumental either for understanding Dulin's diet or in dealing with the Peruvian entity.

Carlos and Santa Maria were aware that their correspondence was being intercepted, which made Carlos resort to even more suspicious terminology. They had business interests mostly dedicated to real estate using Santa Maria's money and connections. However, Gracie and Santa Maria were ultimately able to convince authorities of their innocence of 'Integralist espionage'. The latter was summoned by police and declared he was Carlos' jiu-jitsu student, who over time became a close friend and business associate. Both were spiritualists and vegetarians, which would explain the strange content of their messages. Santa Maria also affirmed that Carlos was not a member of the Integralista party. The espionage affair revealed the relationship between the Carlos and Santa Maria in which the latter was instrumental in many developments that helped the Gracies in the early stages of the Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

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52 The northeastern Brazil became a highly prized strategic point for the Allied war effort due its privileged positions vis-à-vis the South Atlantic and West Africa.


55 Oscar Santa Maria was temporarily appointed Minister of Finance in Eurico Gaspar Dutra's presidency after Getúlio Vargas' overthrow in 1945.

CONCLUSION

From 1939 onward, the three Gracie brothers, George, Hélio, and Carlos were taking different directions. George, who had a perpetually stormy relationship with his brothers, was the only Gracie who still occasionally performed in public matches. Hélio decided to retire temporarily from jiu-jitsu at a relatively young age to enjoy his social upward mobility. He married a separated *nouveau riche* woman and became a corporate executive in one of her family holdings [Gracie 2008: 184]. Carlos, on the other hand, dedicated himself to building new pillars of Brazilian jiu-jitsu by incorporating esoteric practices, dietary rules and embedding a clannish structure into its ‘soft’ cultural format.

The period between the Communist Insurrection in 1935 and the outbreak of the Second World War is particularly relevant to the analysis of the making of Brazilian jiu-jitsu. During this period, the Gracies confronted their opponents on two fronts. They faced opposition among the military and from the Japanese immigrants. Moreover, the very state they had come to represent became an obstacle to their individualistic strategies. Yet under the thin veneer of modernity spearheaded by the new political regime lay a pervasively paternalistic system in which fallen aristocrats like the Gracies remained favorite sons. In turn, they provided their political patrons with their expertise in violence.

In their reinvention of jiu-jitsu, the Gracies engineered an embryonic bundle of traits, including Carlos’ personification of the figure of guru and modern patriarch, to turn a loose set of jiu-jitsu techniques vaguely associated with a Japanese martial arts school into a comprehensive local martial art system.

Resilience symbolized by a defensive ground combat became the hallmark of the Gracies’ Brazilian jiu-jitsu style, forged in confrontations against foreign opponents with technical superiority especially in standing combat. They would lie under their skilled adversaries, whom they held between their legs. The process described elsewhere as ‘self-colonization’, which refers to a deliberate submission to a foreign cultural flow, was, so to speak, withstood by the Gracies’ strong defense [Frühstrück and Manzenreiter 2004: 8–13]. Yet the fighting system they created was not only a defensive or passive style developed to resist the Japanese technical edge. It evolved into a style designed to defeat their opponents from the guard position. The Gracies thereafter advertised their jiu-jitsu by warning those unfamiliar with their style that those underneath could be winning.

In a time of profound changes in which Getúlio Vargas seized power and imposed a dictatorship, the Gracies established their martial art firmly at the heart of the new order. Finally, in the 1940s, a long interregnum began for the Gracies and Getúlio Vargas. Of course, both would be back for another round against their rivals in the post-war period. But the formative years covered in this article are crucial. For, if modern Brazil born in the 1930s it is also true for Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

In the following decades, the Gracies continued to navigate the stormy waters of emergent Brazilian culture and society. Post-war, the Gracies moved from being present principally in the sport sections of newspapers to becoming national celebrities in the pages of mainstream media outlets, always against the ever-present backdrop of populism and nationalist ideologies. The changing fortunes of the Gracies and the journey of their jiu-jitsu, through to its global status today, are topics for further works. This work has focused on the formative crucible of the 1930s through to the early 1940s, an era that illuminates the complex political and cultural status of Gracie jiu-jitsu, particularly in relation to nationalism, immigration and identity.

![Figure 13: ‘Draw between George Gracie and Geo Omori’. The position above serves as a metaphor of the confrontations between the Gracies and the Japanese martial artists. The match resulted in a cultural gridlock. Source: Jornal dos Sports, 1935.](image-url)

REFERENCES


Nationalism, Immigration and Identity
José Cairus

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The practice of martial arts for leisure and exercise is growing rapidly in the United States. In this study, we utilize mixed methods and cultural consensus analysis to examine a cultural model of strategy among Brazilian jiu jitsu athletes in a gym in Atlanta, Georgia, and to explore how that cultural knowledge varies within consensus. This study builds upon previous research in martial arts studies by employing cultural domain analysis and ethnographic research to quantify and link culture to embodied knowledge through a cultural model of strategy. Results show that strategy in Brazilian jiu jitsu revolves around the hierarchy of positional dominance. Low level belt-ranked novice athletes utilize shared understandings of positional dominance to guide their personal strategic selection of techniques, which they habitually practice to the point of embodied reflexivity. High belt-ranked expert athletes eventually reach a level of expertise at which relying exclusively on the cultural model of strategy impedes their performance in competition. These expert athletes develop a personal model of strategic fluidity within the context of the cultural model of strategy which focuses on adaptation to specific opponents and circumstances.
The study of combat sports is one focus of the multidisciplinary field of martial arts studies. Bowman [2017] notes the value of diversity in theory and method in the study of martial arts. Our contribution to martial arts studies is to bring a theoretical orientation from cognitive anthropology to build upon insights by previous researchers within the field, specifically to explore the degree to which fundamental models of strategy are shared among martial artists. To examine this aim, we employ mixed methods from cognitive anthropology, specifically cultural consensus analysis and the analysis of residual agreement.

This research focuses on one training center for Brazilian jiu jitsu (BJJ). In BJJ, the primary objective is to win matches, and shared knowledge regarding how to win comprises a cultural model of strategy in BJJ. Athletes utilize this cultural model of strategy to select techniques to practice to the point of reflexive embodied knowledge. In this way, the cultural model of strategy mediates cultural and embodied knowledge. At the same time, there is likely to be diversity among BJJ athletes in the knowledge and application of a shared cultural model. Our theoretical and methodological orientation enables us to examine this with a degree of specificity.

**BRAZILIAN JIU JITSU**

BJJ is a combat sport and martial art defined by its focus on ground-based grappling techniques with the goal of opponent submission via joint lock or strangle hold. Competitions in Brazilian jiu jitsu are held internationally, and the popularity of BJJ is rapidly expanding. The history of BJJ lies in Japan with its roots in Japanese *jujutsu* and judo.

Japanese jujutsu refers to the unarmed martial arts techniques employed by the samurai in feudal age Japan, which included many grappling maneuvers [Kano 1986]. After the era of the samurai, jujutsu techniques were used as the basis for the martial art and combat sport of judo. Judo rapidly spread in popularity both in its birthplace of Japan and abroad. By the early 1900s, judo had spread to Brazil where it was modified by the Gracie family, focusing on leverage and groundwork as opposed to the high-impact throws characteristic of judo [Green and Svinth 2003]. The resulting system was developed over the first half of the 20th century and referred to as Gracie Jiu-Jitsu. Members of the Gracie family used their system of fighting with much success in the no-holds-barred *'vale tudo'* ('anything goes') fights in Brazil. This success in their home country was superseded when Royce Gracie, a young member of the Gracie family, entered and won the first Ultimate Fighting Championship in 1993 as the smallest competitor. Gracie's success in the UFC led to the rapid and widespread proliferation of what became known as Brazilian jiu jitsu across the world, and especially in the United States [Green and Svinth 2003].

**MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES**

The sociologist Loïc Wacquant’s [2004] *Body and Soul* is widely acknowledged as a foundational text paving the way for modern-day martial arts studies [Garcia and Spencer 2013b]. In *Body and Soul*, Wacquant explores the ‘pugilistic habitus’ of members of a boxing gym in urban Chicago, in part by participating in boxing practice and matches himself. Among other things, this text serves as the proof of concept for Wacquant’s proposed theory of ‘carnal sociology’ operationalized by ‘observer participation’ [Wacquant 2004].

Drawing heavily from the work of his academic advisor Pierre Bourdieu, Wacquant [2004] argues that embodied boxing knowledge, or pugilistic habitus, is transferred through the physical enactment of boxing via gestures and mimetics. He proposes his theory of carnal sociology as a means to understand the pugilistic habitus of boxers. While various forms of embodied participation have been utilized in previous research, carnal sociology posits that a full understanding of a culture can only occur when the researcher experiences the same bodily sensations as those being studied – by, in essence, deploying the body as a tool of inquiry [Wacquant 2004]. Wacquant dubbed the method of deploying the researcher’s body as a tool ‘observer participation’. Wacquant’s work has contributed substantially to the development of the modern-day field of martial arts studies.

Drawing on Wacquant’s theory and methods, martial arts studies aims to understand the embodied knowledge of ‘martial habitus’ through ethnographic methods supplemented by observer participation rooted in carnal sociological theory [Garcia and Spencer 2013b]. Research within martial arts studies has emphasized how the practitioners of combat sports develop embodied knowledge [Hogeveen 2013; Nulty 2017]. Less emphasis has been placed on cognitive, representational forms of knowledge in the process of developing this martial habitus. Our aim in this paper is to help fill this gap by focusing on shared models of strategy among BJJ athletes. We will argue that learning these conventional models of strategy serves as an intervening step in the development of a martial habitus and ultimately the refining of personal strategic model in approaching a match.

This approach also responds to other concerns in this literature. Some researchers have noted the importance of accounting for variation within this embodied knowledge [Brown and Jennings 2013]. Other prominent scholars in the field have argued for the application of mixed methods for tackling larger questions regarding the relationship between culture and embodied knowledge [Bowman 2017; Garcia and Spencer 2013a]. An approach employing cognitive culture theory and cultural domain analysis can provide insight into both the sharing and distribution of cultural models of strategy in BJJ, shedding more light on how knowledge comes to be embodied.
**COGNITIVE THEORY AND METHOD**

In cognitive anthropological theory, culture is defined as that which individuals must know to function effectively in a given social environment [Goodenough 1994]. Cultural models are the implicit shared frameworks that enable individuals to more-or-less accurately interpret the behavior of others and that guide individual social practice [Gatewood 2012; Sewall 1992].

This shared or cultural knowledge is encoded in the form of cultural models [D'Andrade 1995]. Cultural models are skeletal, stripped-down cognitive representations of cultural domains that include the elements of the domain along with the semantic, functional, and causal relationships among those elements. Cultural models include one or more prototypes or typical instantiations of event sequences regarding that domain. So, for example, a cultural model of strategy in a martial arts contest would include the participants' understanding of grappling techniques and how they are best deployed in a variety of conditions in order to achieve victory in the contest.

While cultural models are shared (which, of course, is what makes them 'cultural'), there can be substantial variation as well. Cultural models may be strongly or weakly shared. Within the context of overall sharing, there may be contested features of cultural models. And, there may be little overall sharing of a model, with sharing concentrated within specific social groups. All of these alternatives fit comfortably within a theory of cultural models [Dressler 2018; Gatewood 2012].

The utility of a theory of cultural models was enhanced by the development of cultural consensus analysis [Romney, Weller, and Batchelder 1986]. Cultural consensus analysis is a formal statistical model for determining the degree of sharing of knowledge in a domain within a specific social group [Borgatti and Halgin 2011]. An individual's understanding of a particular cultural domain consists of both cultural knowledge, shared with others, and idiosyncratic knowledge derived from personal biography. Consensus analysis determines cultural knowledge by examining what knowledge is shared among individuals and to what degree it is shared. Respondents are presented with a standardized set of questions sampling knowledge in a cultural domain. These may be in the form of true-false, rank-order, or rating scale items. Working from a correlation matrix among respondents, the initial step in cultural consensus analysis is to determine if there is or is not sharing of knowledge sufficient to infer that individuals are drawing on the same pool of knowledge in their responses. Using factor analytic methods (although cultural consensus analysis is not a factor analysis per se), the first two eigenvalues are extracted from the correlation matrix. If the first eigenvalue is several times larger than the second, there is strong evidence of consensus.

Conventionally, a ratio of the first-to-second eigenvalue greater than 3.0 is taken as evidence of cultural consensus [Weller 2007].

Next, cultural consensus analysis returns a set of coefficients assessing the degree to which each individual agrees with the overall consensus. This is referred to as their 'cultural competence'. It varies between a -1.0 and +1.0 and can be interpreted as the correlation of their individual responses with the consensus. In a strongly shared cultural consensus model, there will be no negative cultural competence coefficients and the average of cultural competence coefficients will be high (at least > .50). Finally, cultural consensus analysis can be used to estimate a 'cultural answer key', which is an average of individual responses to the questions, weighted by each respondent's cultural competence, thus giving higher weight to respondents with whom more others agree. This can be interpreted as a 'cultural best estimate' of how a reasonably knowledgeable member of that social group would respond to the questions.

Even in a situation of higher cultural consensus, however, there may be additional subgroup patterns of residual agreement. Residual agreement refers to 'systematic deviations from consensus' [Boster 1986] and is measured through the second factor loadings gleaned from consensus analysis [Dressler, Balieiro, and dos Santos 2015]. Residual agreement analysis itself can take several forms, ranging from quite distinct subgroup models in a domain where there is weak cultural consensus, to subtly nuanced perspectives within a strongly shared cultural model [Boster and Johnson 1989].

Strategy, in the conventional sense, is a plan of action used to achieve a goal [Swidler 1986]. Cultural consensus analysis can be used to examine the degree to which individuals agree on what actions to take in order to achieve such goals. In Brazilian jiu jitsu, the goal is to win matches via the application of a submission hold on the opponent, and strategy is the selection of techniques to learn and use to win matches. Thus, a cultural model of strategy in BJJ is the shared knowledge of what techniques to use in certain situations in order to win a match. This research conceptualizes the cultural model of strategy as the mediator between culture and embodied knowledge which it explores through a joint cognitive anthropological and carnal sociological lens operationalized by consensus analysis, observer participation, interviews, and ethnography.

A model of strategy guides the acquisition and application of techniques to be used in a BJJ match which become embodied. BJJ practitioners select techniques to learn and use to the point of reflexivity by considering what techniques will allow them to win. In BJJ, techniques are cultural knowledge of how to manipulate an individual's body which are the result of hundreds of years of globalized knowledge exchange.
Once an individual has selected a technique that will help him or her win based upon shared ideas of how to win, they begin training the technique and implementing the technique in matches. The technique becomes embodied knowledge after the individual has trained and implemented the technique over an extended period of time. Thus, a cultural model of strategy links cultural knowledge to embodied knowledge.

Knowledge of strategy is possessed by individuals and groups. Individuals develop strategies based on what has worked for them and what has worked for others. When these individuals effectively apply their strategy to win matches, it influences the strategy of others [Downey 2007]. A cultural model of strategy allows for the application of cognitive methods to determine the contents of the cultural model of strategy and how knowledge of the model is distributed among martial arts practitioners. The cultural model of strategy in BJJ is broad and multifaceted, but this research focuses specifically on the central feature of the model which is the positional dominance hierarchy. Applying the theory and methods of cognitive anthropology, we will examine the degree to which a cultural model of strategy employing positional dominance is shared among BJJ practitioners; what the shared hierarchy of positional dominance is; and, how that cultural model of strategy varies among BJJ practitioners with differing levels of training and experience.

SETTING: ALLIANCE HEADQUARTERS ATLANTA

Alliance Headquarters lies in Northeast Atlanta, Georgia. Alliance HQ is significant within the jiu jitsu community because it is the headquarters location of the Alliance Jiu Jitsu affiliation, one of the highest ranked affiliations in top level international competition with hundreds of locations in dozens of countries. To better understand cultural models of strategy at Alliance HQ, the first author employed Wacquant’s carnal sociological method of observer participation and trained with the athletes at Alliance throughout the entirety of data collection.

At Alliance HQ, practice sessions follow a basic structure of warm up drills, technique practice, limited scope drills, and a form of open sparring, known as ‘rolling’. Rolling closely replicates the conditions of a Brazilian jiu jitsu competition match and begins with students pairing off and performing the ‘slap and tap’ handshake to signal the beginning of the match. Once a rolling session begins, athletes vie for dominant positions and ultimately submission holds. Once an athlete has successfully applied a submission hold in the form of a choke or joint lock, his opponent ‘taps out’ to signal defeat. Tapping out consists of either physically tapping an opponent’s body with a hand, or verbalizing ‘tap!’ loud enough for the opponent to hear. The strategic element of the sport is evident when watching athletes, especially at high levels, methodically pit techniques and counters against one another in this struggle for dominance.

Athletes fall into one of five belt ranks: white, blue, purple, brown, or black, based on their level of experience. Although there are only five belt ranks, it takes years for athletes to progress from one belt rank to the next. Acquiring a blue belt often takes two years, and acquiring a black belt often takes a decade or longer. The following methods were used to explore shared understandings of strategy among these jiu jitsu athletes.

METHODS

 Observer Participation

In order to better understand the embodied and shared knowledge of strategy in BJJ at Alliance HQ, the first author, who had several years of experience in grappling sports at the time of the research, employed Wacquant’s method of carnal sociology and observer participation by training with athletes at Alliance throughout the entire period of data collection. The insights gleaned from this method, while not recorded in a traditional format, enabled the first author to have a better understanding of the basic training of a BJJ athlete and heavily informed the remainder of the data collection and analysis. This observer participation provided depth and nuance to the descriptive portion of the research. Participation in the everyday activity of the gym also served build rapport and trust with the participants in the study.

Phase I Methods

All data collection took place during the months of May and June 2017 at Alliance HQ in Atlanta, GA and consisted of Phase I preliminary open-ended interviews, Phase II structured interviews including a pile sort/rank order exercise, and Phase III semistructured follow-up interviews. For Phase I interviews, non-random purposive sampling was used to select five black belts based on availability as well as official and unofficial recognition of authority within the gym. The five selected gym members were asked general and personal questions regarding history, philosophy, and strategy in BJJ. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo software. The results of this analysis were used to inform the interpretation of the Phase II consensus analysis results.

Phase II Methods

Phase II utilized stratified convenience sampling to select 10 participants from each belt-rank (white, blue, purple, brown, and black) at Alliance HQ to participate in structured interviews, resulting in a total of 50
structured interviews. The interview schedule for Phase II structured interviews consisted of a demographic information section (sex, belt-rank, height, weight, education, employment status, and competition frequency) and a rank order/pile sort section. For the rank order/pile sort section of the interview participants were presented with 14 laminated note cards with a position commonly employed in BJJ written on each card. Participants were asked to group together cards and then order those groups in terms of positional dominance. Participants were informed that the position of cards within the same group was not considered, only the position of each group relative to other groups and the contents of those groups. Additionally, participants were informed that they could make as many or few groups as they felt appropriate.

Data collected from the rank order/pile sort exercise was first coded as pile sort data. Nonmetric multi-dimensional scaling coordinates from the pile sort data were obtained using the program ANTHROPAC and a nonmetric multi-dimensional scaling plot was obtained using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Each participant’s response was coded as pile sort data with the number of groups created by participants and the contents of those groups being considered but not the order in which they placed the groups. This pile sort data was input into ANTHROPAC to create an aggregate proximity matrix which displays the proportion of times two positions appeared in the same pile. The values from the aggregate proximity matrix were then used to obtain coordinates for a nonmetric multi-dimensional scaling plot. These coordinates were then input into SPSS to create the nonmetric multi-dimensional scaling plot. A nonmetric multidimensional scaling plot places elements onto a two dimensional space based upon their level of association with each other. The nonmetric multi-dimensional scaling plot used the values from the aggregate proximity matrix to display the 14 BJJ positions on a plot based on the 50 participants’ shared perceived association between each position.

In addition to being coded as pile sort data, data collected from the rank order/pile sort exercise was also coded as rank order data, and consensus analysis was performed in ANTHROPAC. BJJ positions belonging to groups of BJJ positions considered to be more dominant were given higher rank values than those assigned into groups of BJJ positions considered to be less dominant. Additionally, participants with more groups of BJJ positions had higher values associated with the group they indicated as most dominant. For example, a participant who created nine groups of BJJ positions had a value of nine given to all the BJJ positions in the group of BJJ positions they categorized as most dominant, whereas a participant who created five groups had a value of five given to all the BJJ positions in the group of BJJ positions they categorized as most dominant. Regardless of how many groups of BJJ positions a participant created, all positions they grouped in the lowest group were given a value of one. Consensus analysis was conducted in ANTHROPAC which yielded an eigenvalue ratio indicating the level of consensus among the group as well as competence values for each individual. The competence values for each individual participant were input into SPSS in order to perform hypothesis testing. We recognize that combining ranking and pile sorts in this way is somewhat unusual, but it conforms to the thinking of our respondents. A standard – i.e., unordered – pile sort was attempted, but no respondent was willing to categorize positions without respect to their potential dominance in a match setting. Therefore, the coding and analysis of the data accurately reflects the respondents’ thinking.

To test the hypothesis that competence in the cultural model of strategy is higher in individuals with higher belt-rank, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Belt-rank was set as the independent variable and competence was set as the dependent variable. The alpha level was set at .05. A nonparametric ANOVA was also conducted to ensure accuracy of the one way ANOVA results due to non-normality in the data.

Furthermore, residual agreement analysis was conducted on the rank order data. The technique for residual agreement analysis developed by Dressler, Balieiro and Santos [2015] was used. Participants were sorted into two groups based on whether their second loading factor score was positive or negative. Consensus analysis was conducted on both groups independently, and the cultural answer key of each group was input into SPSS alongside the cultural answer key for the entire sample. The values of the cultural answer key for the entire sample were subtracted from the cultural answer key of both the positive and negative second factor loading groups, and the resulting variables were used to create a plot displaying the elements of the cultural model of strategy by which the two groups diverged in knowledge. Finally, ANOVA was used to test the relationship between average residual agreement and belt rank.

Phase III Methods

Semistructured follow up interviews were conducted in Phase III to determine how individual strategy at different belt-ranks relates to the cultural model of strategy. Non-random purposive sampling was used to select one white belt, one blue belt, one purple belt, one brown belt, and three black belt respondents based on their availability. Participants were asked questions regarding their personal history in the sport, defining aspects of their personal strategy, development of their personal strategy, and for elements of their strategy which defy generally understood strategic conventions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using NVivo software. The results of this analysis were used to aid in the interpretation of the Phase II consensus analysis results.
Phase I interviews indicated that a salient element of strategy among members of Alliance HQ was the concept of ‘position over submission’, which indicates a preference to maintain dominant positions rather than attempt submissions from non-dominant positions. Furthermore, 14 commonly used positions were elicited during this phase. Finally, qualitative analysis indicated three common categories into which these positions are grouped. Risky positions are identified as such because both athletes are considered to have high degrees of mobility but low control over their opponent, which indicates the possibility for a rapid change in positional dominance. Positions in this category include Both Standing, Top Sprawl, and Kesa Gatame (a position similar to a finished ‘headlock’ position in American styles of wrestling).

Guard Positions include all positions related to the guard but can be further categorized into top guard and bottom guard positions. Bottom guard positions are those in which the athlete is on bottom with legs wrapped around the body or legs of their opponent and include the Closed Guard, Half Guard, and Open Guard. The goal of an athlete in a bottom guard position is to ‘sweep’ the opponent – meaning to make a transition to a top side finishing position – in order to achieve a more dominant position or to attempt a submission from the guard. Top guard positions are those in which the athlete is entangled by the legs of their opponent and include the Standing in Guard, Kneeling in Guard, and Top Half Guard. The goal of an athlete in a top guard position is to ‘pass’ the guard of their opponent in order to achieve a finishing position.

Finishing positions were considered the most dominant group of positions. The goal of an athlete in a finishing position is to maintain that position and attempt high percentage submissions resulting in winning a match. Positions included in this group are Mount, Back Mount, Side Control, North South, and Knee on Belly. Generally, these positions were all considered to be of equal dominance, but some participants noted that ‘Mount’ and ‘Back Mount’ were more dominant than the other three positions.

Phase III interviews elicited three primary themes regarding the development of personal strategy in the context of shared ideas of strategy: Fluidity, Personal History and Physicality, and Weaknesses into Strengths. Fluidity refers to the degree to which athletes adapt their personal strategies to conform to the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents. Interestingly, the theme of fluidity was far more evident in the personal strategies of higher belt ranked athletes than lower belt ranked athletes. Lower belt ranked athletes generally had a single fixed strategy which they applied indiscriminately against every opponent. Conversely, high belt ranked athletes did not conceive of personal strategy outside the context of the details of a particular match such as what opponent they are facing and their opponent’s strategy. The concept of fluidity is best exemplified by the following quotation from a participant.

I think a lot of it has to do with just adapting, being able to adapt during the fight and apply [...] it’s like playing video games – you’ve got the mage, the ranger beats the mage, mage beats the knight, the knight beats the ranger. So you need to be able to look into this diagram and understand how these positions can be applied against other positions to beat them. It’s the same thing in jiu jitsu. For example if the guy’s on his knees, I can’t play de la riva, he just countered my de la riva guard, so now I have to play either spider or maybe butterfly or something, so then he wants to stand up and then I gotta lay back down and now I can play de la riva.

The second theme elicited in this phase was Personal History and Physicality. Participants commonly cited personality attributes, participation in other athletic endeavors, and physical attributes as the origin of peculiarities and preferences in their personal strategy. Notably, the tendency to point to these factors as contributing to personal strategy – or even to having a fixed personal strategy – generally decreased with experience level as noted in the Fluidity theme.

The third theme elicited in this phase was Weaknesses into Strengths. Related to the theme of personal history and physicality, participants noted that some aspects of their personal strategy they identified as particularly effective were the result of compensation for weaknesses in other aspects of their game. This included physical weaknesses and technical weaknesses. Again though, more advanced athletes were generally less likely to point to their weaknesses as playing a role in their strategy – presumably because they were less likely to point to having a defined personal strategy in general as indicated in the fluidity theme.

Phase II Descriptive Statistics

Fifty members of Alliance HQ, 10 from each belt-rank (white, blue, purple, brown, and black) participated in Phase II data collection. Background data on the sample are presented in Table 1 above. All participants were male with an average age of 36.6. Participants with white belts tended to be somewhat younger than other belt ranks, although not significantly, and levels of education and occupational statuses tended to be comparable.
The three positions identified as risky are interspersed throughout the plot and not clustered in a coherent fashion. These positions are distributed in this manner on the plot because of the identified variation in dominance between these positions. The highly dominant finishing positions are clustered on the left of the plot, and the less dominant guard positions are clustered towards the right of the plot which indicates that positions become more dominant when going right to left. This explains the distribution of the risky positions because ’Both Standing’, which was considered the least dominant of the three, is on the far right of the plot. Furthermore, ’Top Sprawl’ was identified as more dominant and is further left of the ’Both Standing’ position. Finally, ’Kesa Gatame’ was identified as the most dominant risky position and is positioned furthest left of all three positions identified as risky. The labelling of these positions as risky explains why they are not clustered with either the categories of finishing or guard positions, and the identification of a dominance hierarchy within risky positions explains their distribution on the plot.

### Cultural Consensus

When the ranking of the positions in terms of positional dominance was examined with cultural consensus analysis, a consensus was found. The ratio of the first-to-second eigenvalue, indicative of overall agreement, was 8.138, with a mean cultural competence of .79 (±.15). Participants widely agreed that finishing positions (those to the left in Figure 1) were more dominant than guard positions, and that risky positions involved little control of an opponent.

### Multidimensional Scaling

The results of the sorting/ranking task, treating the positions solely in terms of how they were grouped, is presented in Figure 1 overleaf. The multidimensional scaling plot displays a clustering of the positions identified as finishing positions in Phase I on the left side of the plot, including ’Mount’, ’Back Mount’, ’Side Control’, ’North South’, and ’Knee on Belly’. Additionally, another cluster further to the right contains all of the positions identified as guard positions. Finally, not fitting neatly into either of these clusters, the risky positions of ’Both Standing’, ’Top Sprawl’, and ’Kesa Gatame’ are positioned outside of the other clusters. Interestingly, the finishing positions in the multidimensional scaling plot are closely clustered together, whereas the guard positions are loosely clustered. This demonstrates high levels of association regarding finishing positions and low levels of association regarding guard positions. Additionally, the three risky positions are interspersed throughout the plot and not clustered together at all. The difference in the cluster density between finishing and guard positions as well as the wide dispersion of risky positions is consistent with the qualitative evidence from Phase I and III interviews. Participants in Phase I noted that guard positions were further grouped into bottom guard and top guard positions, but that both bottom and top guard were considered to be of equal dominance. The differentiation between top guard and bottom guard positions in relation to personal strategy was further explained in Phase III. The relatively larger cluster size of guard positions in the multidimensional scaling plot is a result of the acknowledgement of individual strategic variation within the guard position category. Simply put, practitioners recognize that while personal preference for top guard ‘passing’ or bottom guard ‘sweeping’ strategies are distinct from each other, both are of equal dominance.

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**Table 1:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Sample (n=50)</th>
<th>White Belt (n=10)</th>
<th>Blue Belt (n=10)</th>
<th>Purple Belt (n=10)</th>
<th>Brown Belt (n=10)</th>
<th>Black Belt (n=10)</th>
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</tbody>
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Variation in Cultural Consensus Between Expert and Novice Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Athletes
George Karl Bennett and William W. Dressler
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Figure 1: Multidimensional scaling plot of pile sort of positions

Figure 2: Mean cultural competence by belt rank
A one-way ANOVA was carried out to determine if there were differences in cultural competence by belt rank. The resulting F-ratio was significant (F = 3.31; df = 4, 45; p < .02), indicating differences among belt-ranks in the degree of agreement with the overall cultural consensus regarding positional dominance. These differences are shown in Figure 2 opposite. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that blue belts tended to have the highest cultural competence, while black belts tended to have the lowest cultural competence. Another interesting feature of Figure 2 is the higher overall variability in cultural competence among black belts. While these differences stand out, it should be emphasized that no group lacks an understanding of the cultural consensus model of strategy (i.e., mean cultural competence for each belt rank is > .69). The results do show, however, that cultural consensus analysis is sensitive enough to detect subtle differences among the belt ranks.

Residual Agreement

Finally, residual agreement was explored. As noted above, residual agreement exists when there is sharing beyond the original consensus. The study of residual agreement requires that the original consensus be removed from ratings; hence, Dressler et al. [2015] found that ratings from subgroups identified by the second factor loadings could be analyzed in terms of the deviations of items within those subgroups from the original cultural consensus. When these deviations are plotted, it can pinpoint where in the domain of the knowledge the groups diverge.

The plotted deviations of the items are shown in Figure 3. The two groups were formed by dividing the sample based on the sign of the second factor loading. Furthermore, analysis of variance showed that the deviations plotted along the x-axis derive primarily from black belt respondents, while the deviations along the y-axis derive primarily from white belt respondents. There is a tendency for white belts to rate as somewhat more dominant than the consensus precisely those positions that the black belts rate as less dominant. Conversely, the black belts rate as more dominant precisely the positions that the white belts rate as less dominant. (The correlation between the two sets of ratings is r = -.99). In general, the black belts rate risker positions as somewhat more important than the overall group consensus, while the white belts tend to rate more basic positions as more important than the overall group consensus.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to build upon previous research on martial arts by employing a theoretical approach derived from cognitive anthropology and applying a mixed-methods research design. Employing cultural consensus analysis, we found that there is strong agreement on the dominance of the primary positions employed in BJJ...
grappling. Generally, members of Alliance HQ categorize positions as either guard, finishing, or risky positions. Guard positions are considered less dominant than finishing positions, and the goal of an athlete in a guard position is to transition to a finishing position. Finishing positions are the dominant category and an athlete’s goals in finishing positions are to attempt submission holds to win the match. Risky positions can vary in dominance but offer an athlete less control over their opponent’s body.

The major aim of the study was to determine if BJJ athletes shared a basic model of the deployment of these positions. Analyses using cultural consensus analysis indicated a relatively highly shared model among purple belts, with, at the same time, systematic variation in the distribution of agreement. The mean cultural competence for the model overall, .79 (± .15), indicates that, for about 11 out of the 14 items, BJJ respondents order positions in the same way along a continuum of dominance, leaving about three of the items to be placed idiosyncratically in their rankings. At the same time, however, cultural consensus analysis is sufficiently sensitive to detect systematic variation among the belt ranks, with the intermediate belt ranks having higher cultural competence than the lowest and highest ranks. This is consistent with a process in which participants in the sport slowly develop competence in the model of fighting as they train more and that knowledge becomes embodied, and then after a time they come to integrate their own personal strategy along with the culturally encoded model of strategy.

This interpretation of the process would suggest a perfect inverted parabola or bicorn curve describing the association of belt rank and cultural competence; however, purple belts are not consistent with this pattern of association. During observer participation, the first author noted a tendency for some of the purple belts in training to have earned their ranking at other centers, having trained under different systems. Therefore, while they are experienced in jiu jitsu, they are still relatively new to the system of BJJ. This could account for this anomalous finding.

The major variation detected in the sharing of the cultural model of positional dominance involves the relatively lower agreement with the overall model exhibited by black belts; the large range of variation in cultural competence among black belts; and, the high residual agreement among black belts. This variation is consistent with open-ended interviews conducted with black belts, and specifically the notion of fluidity introduced earlier. Rather than going for positions that are generally regarded as dominant, black belts alter their strategies depending on the action of their opponents. They know, both in a strictly cognitive sense and in an embodied sense, the strongest positions. They know, at the same time, that riskier positions can be employed against opponents who present with specific weakness or tendencies, and they have the skill to deploy those riskier positions. The analysis of residual agreement confirms this, showing that black belts do indeed rate those riskier positions as more useful than the overall group of athletes rates them in the total group consensus model. As the common saying goes: ‘You have to know the rules to break them’.

With respect to the model of positional dominance itself, among guard positions, members recognize both top guard and bottom guard positions. Both top and bottom guard are considered to be of equal dominance, and individual preference for top or bottom guard positions is dictated by the personal history and physicality of athletes. In some instances, weaknesses of some athletes force them to prefer certain positions, and they often become highly proficient in these positions. White belts prefer bottom guard positions relative to the overall sample because their most common opponents, other beginners, are susceptible to attacks from these positions. Black belts display relatively lower levels of agreement regarding the cultural model of strategy because they have developed an idiosyncratic perspective regarding strategy and demonstrate a preference for risky but dominant positions relative to the overall sample. This idiosyncratic perspective of strategy is largely informed by the theme of fluidity and results in low levels of agreement regarding a fixed model of strategy among black belts.

These results are consistent with other studies that have compared novices and experts. For example, in their study of sport fishermen, Boster and Johnson [1989] found that novices and experts strongly shared a model of the classification of fish on the basis primarily of morphology. At the same time, in analyzing residual agreement, they found that expert fishermen diverged somewhat from this basic knowledge by including their more sophisticated understanding of fish behavior and habitat. They argue that the experts do not have a different model, but rather are able to layer on additional knowledge to the base. This offers another way of thinking about fluidity among the black belts; they have command over the basic model, but layer on top of this a more sophisticated understanding of positional dominance based on years of experience and competition.

Garcia and Spencer [2013a] and Bowman [2017] have argued for the elaboration of research design and data collection in the study of martial arts. The research presented here built upon previous studies of martial arts by utilizing a cognitive anthropological framework to examine the role of representational knowledge in the development of an embodied strategy in matches. This study thus contributes both to the field of martial arts studies and to a better understanding of distributed cognition, again demonstrating the theoretical value of a focus on the martial arts [Bowman and Judkins 2017].
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Variation in Cultural Consensus Between Expert and Novice Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Athletes
George Karl Bennett and William W. Dressler

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There is a dearth of centralized organizations that focus on systematic methods of training, evaluating, and certifying martial arts instructors. Presently, martial arts instructors often learn to teach through the apprenticeship of observation. Learning through the apprenticeship of observation is known to facilitate poor pedagogical techniques by the instructor and propagates bad pedagogical techniques through ‘generations’ of instructor-to-student transmission. Since rank is correlated with duration of practice as a martial artist, it is often assumed that those of higher rank are more competent in both martial arts and teaching ability than those of lower rank. The purpose of this study was to relate martial arts instructors’ behavior with their rank. Instructors who differ in black belt rank (1st to 5th degree) were video recorded teaching a martial arts class. Videos were analyzed using the Academic Learning Time–Physical Education (ALT-PE) system and Cheffers’ [1990] Adaptation to Flanders’ [1970] Interaction Analysis System. As predicted, there was a positive relation between rank and instructor behaviors expected to result in better student performance. Comparing formal and informal training methods for instructors would be valuable in the future.
INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the martial arts industry represents over $4 billion US in trade a year and has grown more than 5% in the past 5 years [IBIS World 2018]. More than 72,000 people are employed in over 67,000 related businesses throughout the United States. In 2014, there were 3.7 million participants age six and over. This reflects a large number of people who act as students and as instructors in a martial arts setting.

The development of martial arts has led to hundreds of organizations representing dozens of different styles of martial arts. For example, from Yoshukai karate, itself an offshoot of Chito-Ryu karate, there are the following organizations: United States Yoshukai Karate Association, World Yoshukai Karate Kobudo Organization, Yoshukai International, Yoshukai Karate International, Yoshukan Karate Association, and several smaller organizations of less than a half dozen schools. As such, there is no central governing body for martial arts, even for individual styles such as karate or judo. Even sports which are recognized by the Olympics, such as judo, have numerous organizations. Judo has 6 different organizations in the United States. This decentralization of authority in martial arts has disadvantages when it comes to instructor training. There is not a systematized method for training new instructors, evaluating existing instructors, or quantifying student learning outcomes.

Numerous organizations have attempted to provide instructor training and certification. Large organizations, such as the United States Tae Kwon Do Alliance, as well as small organizations, such as the American Kyuki-Do Federation, provide instructor training to develop prospective and existing instructors within a specific style. Groups that offer instructor certification regardless of the martial arts organization to which the instructor belongs do exist, but none of them have external authority (such as by an accrediting agency) to do so. The majority of the certifications are also offered without validating the instructor’s teaching skill or credentials- they merely require a payment to be sent to be certified. Without an external authority to check the certification process of any of these organizations, there is no quality control. This lack of quality control can lead to individuals being ‘certified’, but this is a meaningless designation.

Because of the lack of a centralized organization to teach and certify teachers, martial arts instructors may learn to teach through the apprenticeship of observation [Schempp 1989]. New instructors are usually identified as talented or energetic students as they progress through the ranks [Czarnecka 2001]. These students are given teaching responsibilities for lower ranked students, presumably acquiring experience in teaching in the process. As students progress in rank, they gain greater responsibility and authority, eventually being able to run an entire class for the duration of a teaching period, usually 1-2 hours. Czarnecka [2001] argues that virtually no schools provide formal training during these instructional experiences. As such, most martial arts instructors have no formal understanding of pedagogy and often have pedagogical techniques which are limited in scope and effectiveness. Czarnecka [2001] emphasizes that learning through the apprenticeship of observation may lead to poor pedagogical techniques by the instructor, and propagation of bad pedagogical techniques through ‘generations’ of instructor-to-student transmission. Furthermore, those learning from the apprenticeship of observation are unlikely to be familiar with issues relating to child protection and welfare, diversity and inclusiveness, and health and safety.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SYSTEMS

Teacher behavior impacts student learning [Graber 2001]. Teachers can influence how students interact with and learn the content [Brophy 1986]. Studies conducted in physical education settings indicate that teachers spend more time in management and less time instructing than they believe [Graber 2001]. Behavioral observation systems attempt to quantify student behavior, teacher behavior, and student-teacher interactions. These data are helpful for determining what, exactly, is occurring in the practice space and how that may affect student learning. Non-systematic observation systems include the eyeball technique, checklists, and rating scales [van der Mars 1989: 5]. The eyeball technique entails having an observer watch an instructional activity and then provide subjective qualitative feedback to the instructor. These non-systematic methods are typically easy to do but are subject to significant bias in data collection and analysis [van der Mars 1989: 6]. For example, the eyeball technique is often influenced by the halo effect, whereby other behaviors of a teacher – such as them being positive and well-liked – affect how the observer interprets the teacher’s behavior.

Systematic observation methods attempt to minimize bias but require more time and expertise to use [van der Mars 1989: 7]. Appropriate training is essential to ensure appropriate reliability and validity in the data obtained. Observation systems may be quantitative – where numerical data attempts to explain what is happening, such as how many minutes students spend waiting – or qualitative – where text data attempts to explain why events are happening, such as why the instructor manages the class so that the student waits. Within quantitative systems, Cheffler’s Adaptation of Flander’s Interaction Analysis System (CAFIAS) attempts to describe interaction patterns between the teacher and students [Chefflers 1990]. The Academic Learning Time–Physical Education (ALT-PE) system attempts to
quantify the amount of time students spend engaged in various activities during a class [Metzler 1989: 225]. The CAFIAS is a system where an observer records what the teacher and student behaviors are in an ongoing fashion [Cheffers 1990]. The observer records behavior whenever it changes or every six seconds, whichever comes first. Therefore, if a teacher is lecturing for 12 seconds, it is recorded as two instances of lecturing. If the teacher lectures for five seconds and then a student interrupts with a question, it is recorded as one instance of lecturing and one instance of student-initiated question. The CAFIAS includes categories for verbal and non-verbal behaviors by either the teacher or the students. Data analysis includes reporting of simple percentages – how many behaviors of a certain type occur in a lesson – as well as interaction analysis – what the most common patterns of teacher-student interactions are. There are 20 interaction patterns and up to ten interaction patterns are typically analyzed. The CAFIAS has a bias towards teacher behavior, and quantifies interactions, but is not as good about describing what, exactly, students are doing, as van der Mars argues [1989: 119].

The ALT-PE system is based on the theory that academic learning time – how much time students spend learning a concept – predicts student knowledge acquisition [Berliner 1975]. The observer selects three students and then records what one student is doing during a six second span, then records the next student, then the third, and rotates back to the first [Metzler 1989: 225]. Each student behavior is quantified according to a series of levels, ultimately culminating in the student engaged in a motor-appropriate task, which as a percentage of time is the ALT-PE. The ALT-PE system quantifies how much time students spend doing various tasks and behaviors but does not describe the interaction between the teacher and the students. The relationship between ALT-PE and martial arts skill acquisition has been demonstrated [Ko 1986]. In that study, students were recorded performing three martial arts skills, and their performance on these skills was scored by blinded observers. The performance level was then related to ALT-PE of the students during class. A significant relationship was found, confirming that the ALT-PE is an appropriate tool to measure student skill acquisition in martial arts. The ALT-PE system used in this study has 14 domains for behaviors, including motor-engaged, which is the value used to determine the actual ALT-PE [Metzler 1989: 225].

Systematic observation methods have been used and described in a martial arts setting. Weise [1995] videotaped two instructors, each teaching one of three one-hour lessons: to adult mixed-rank students, youth beginning students, and youth mixed-rank students. Two 20-minute samples (from adult mixed-rank and youth beginning classes) were analyzed. A 10-minute sample from the youth mixed-rank class was used as training. A modification of the Classroom Observation Record (COR), which is a checklist of behaviors engaged in by the teacher, was used. The COR is completed for an individual instructional theme – usually there are five to seven in each class period. The results of the observations were not reported, since the purpose of the study was to establish reliability and construct validity for the modified COR.

Vertonghen, Theebom, and Cloes [2012] studied five teachers of aikido, five of kickboxing, and 10 of karate using a questionnaire called the Teaching Approach to Martial Arts (TAMA). Each instructor had an interview before a class period, were observed and videotaped during a class period, and had an interview and TAMA given after the class period. The TAMA consisted of seven questions with five levels ranging from traditional to efficient (or sport). The TAMA results were explained in the context of the interviews and observation, which confirmed that the TAMA was measuring what it intended to measure. The purpose of the TAMA was to identify classes and styles as traditional, education, or efficient/sport.

An unvalidated modification of the COR was used in one study, and the other study was attempting to establish the validity of a new observation system. Neither used a previously validated system to observe the interaction between the teacher and the students. The interaction between teacher and students has not been documented in the context of teaching martial arts. In the study by Vertonghen, Theebom and Cloes [2012], although interviews were conducted, their purpose was to establish the style of instruction, rather than document how the teacher and students felt about the interaction in the class. Finally, the focus on most research of pedagogy in martial arts has focused on teaching young students. The interaction patterns between teachers and adult students is understudied.

OBJECTIVE

No study that we are aware of has applied systematic observation to compare the experience of the instructor, as determined by their martial arts rank, on instructional behaviors. Since rank is correlated with duration of practice as a martial artist, it is often assumed that those of higher rank are more competent in both martial arts and teaching ability than those of lower rank. In this study, all instructors held first degree black belt rank or higher. The purpose of this study was to relate martial arts instructor’s behavior with their rank in a non-random, convenience sample of two martial arts schools in an urban area in the southeastern United States. Given that the CAFIAS and ALT-PE system prove useful in this context, collecting more expansive data may allow for generalizations to be made about martial arts instructor behavior.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The setting for this study is two martial arts schools located in an urban area in the southeastern United States. One is a non-commercial martial arts school owned as a side hobby by the owner and not a source of income for the owner. The other is a professional commercial martial arts school which is the primary source of income for the owner.

The study was approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board (IRB) and informed consent was obtained for all participants prior to study start. Participants were the teachers of the classes. The head instructors of each school were asked to identify all of the active adult (18 years of age or older) black belts in their school and provided an email address for each black belt. Every active adult black belt in each school was then sent a recruitment email soliciting participation. There were no exclusion criteria. Those individuals who volunteered replied to the email and were provided with an informed consent form to sign.

Once informed consent was obtained, a time for the participant to teach their class was chosen by the participant. Regular students of each school attended the recorded class as usual. The IRB did not require consent from the students, since they were not the focus of the investigation. No attempt was made to prevent participants from being students in the classes of other participants. However, every participant regularly acts as students in the other participants’ regularly offered class. Classes were recorded over the span of two months, with no attempt made to control for number of students, time of day or day of the week of the class, or marketing of the class to students. The goal was to make the class be as routine as possible in every way except the instructions to the instructor on the content to teach during that class period.

Participants were considered ‘Low’ rank if they were ranked as a first-degree black belt, as ‘Middle’ rank if they were considered by the head instructors of both schools to be a proficient, but not expert, instructor, and as ‘High’ rank if they were considered by the head instructors of both schools to be an expert instructor (Table 1 below).

All participants had engaged in a certified instructor training (CIT) course held by both schools which were involved in this study. The CIT was either a weekend intensive or a weekly session, each

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<td>High</td>
<td>Kyuki-Do</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>AYK</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Karate</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Characteristics of participants
Relationship Between Rank and Instructor Teaching Technique in an Adult Martial Arts Setting

Erik H. Hofmeister, Bryan A. McCullick, Philip D. Tomporowski, and Paul G. Schempp

Figure 1:
Relationship between CAFIAS categories (x-axis) and ALT-PE domains (y-axis). Values for CAFIAS are number of counts of that behaviour. Values for ALT-PE are number of 6 second segments with that activity. All relationships are significant (p<0.01).
composed of at least eight hours of instruction in how to teach. Topics were characteristics of a great instructor, developing student rapport, basic class structure and warmup, teaching techniques, integrating a new student, and martial arts troubleshooting. Each session included a short practicum where the participants taught the rest of the group and received feedback on their performance. The CIT program had been offered every six months for four years prior to the start of the study. The CIT program was held outside of regular class hours, and students at either school could elect to participate for a fee. The last CIT cycle was held approximately two months prior to the start of this study.

A video and audio recording of each training segment was made. A camera was placed on a tripod facing at a 45-degree angle to the orientation of the students, directed towards the students but including the instructor in the frame. Recording began immediately before students bowed to begin the class and ended once the students bowed to the teacher at the end of the class. The recordings captured the entire one-hour class period. The audio recording was from the same camera, with no additional microphones.

Each video was scored at separate times using the CAFIAS and ALT-PE system. Each video was reviewed continuously for the entire duration of the class. Class duration was defined as the time between the end of the bow at the start of class and the start of the bow at the end of class. Intra-rater reliability was established by the observer rescoring the first three videos viewed at least three months later. The first three videos represent one instructor each from the Low, Middle, and High groups.

Intra-rater reliability was calculated using Pearson’s correlation. The correlation for the CAFIAS was significant for all three videos (P<0.0001) and the correlation was high (r=0.98, 0.99, and 0.99). The correlation for the ALT-PE system was significant for all three videos (P<0.0001) and the correlation was high (r=0.92, 0.96, 0.96).

Normality was determined using the D’Agostino-Pearson method. Relationships between CAFIAS categories and ALT-PE domains were evaluated using linear regression to analyze how the CAFIAS categories and ALT-PE domains relate with each other and to provide further evidence for validity in the form of relations to other variables. Significance was set at α = 0.01. CAFIAS categories and ALT-PE domains were compared among three levels of instructor rank (Low, Middle, and High) by visual examination of the data. CAFIAS categories and ALT-PE domains were compared between those instructors teaching primarily partner-based classes and those teaching classes without partner work by visual examination of the data. Statistical comparisons were not made due to the low sample size.

RESULTS

Statistically significant linear regression relationships are provided in Table 2 and Figure 1. Five CAFIAS categories and three response patterns had significant relationships with ALT-PE domains.

CAFIAS Differences Between Instructor Ranks

High ranked instructors had nearly twice the amount of nonverbal praise of Low and Mid ranked instructors (Table 3). High ranked instructors provided more instruction and gave less directions than Low and Mid ranked instructors. High ranked instructors had more interactions where students provided higher order verbal and nonverbal responses than Low and Mid ranked instructors. Low ranked instructors had more confusion than Mid and High ranked instructors. High ranked instructors had less silence than Low and Mid ranked instructors.

ALT-PE System Differences Between Instructor Ranks

High ranked instructors had dramatically less wait time than Low and Mid ranked instructors (Table 4). They also had 50% more time dedicated to Cognitive learning. Low ranked instructors had dramatically less Practice-Indirect time than High and Mid ranked instructors. Mid ranked instructors had less ALT-PE than Low and High ranked instructors.

CAFIAS Differences Between Partner and Non-Partner Classes

Instructors of non-partner classes gave notably more verbal praise than instructors of partner classes (Table 5). They also had more verbal acceptance, gave more directions, had students who gave predictable verbal and nonverbal responses and analytical nonverbal responses. Instructors of partner classes gave more verbal and nonverbal instruction.

ALT-PE System Differences Between Partner and Non-Partner Classes

Instructors of non-partner classes spent more time in transition, management, and rest than instructors of partner classes (Table 6). They also had a higher ALT-PE. Instructors of partner classes had more Cognitive learning time and dramatically more Indirect skill practice time than instructors of non-partner classes.
Table 2:
Relationship between occurrence of CAFIAS categories and patterns and time of ALT-PE domains. Direction of relationship designated to be positive (+) or negative (-) for each ALT-PE domain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAFIAS Category</th>
<th>ALT-PE Domain</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Verbal (5)</td>
<td>Transition (-)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motor Indirect (+)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged Cognitive (+)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Verbal Direction (6)</td>
<td>Motor Indirect (-)</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged Cognitive (-)</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Nonverbal Instruction (15)</td>
<td>Transition (-)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motor Indirect (-)</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictable Student Nonverbal Response (18)</td>
<td>Motor Indirect (-)</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Verbal Pattern (5-5)</td>
<td>Engaged Cognitive (+)</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Direct Command Student Predictable Nonverbal Response Pattern (6-18)</td>
<td>Motor Indirect (-)</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged Cognitive (-)</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Predictable Nonverbal Response Pattern (18-18)</td>
<td>Rest (+)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAFIAS Category</td>
<td>Low #</td>
<td>Mid #</td>
<td>High #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Praise Verbal (2)</td>
<td>129 ± 56</td>
<td>108 ± 61</td>
<td>147 ± 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Praise Nonverbal (12)</td>
<td>14 ± 11</td>
<td>12.33 ± 5</td>
<td>26 ± 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Acceptance Verbal (3)</td>
<td>35 ± 17</td>
<td>27 ± 13</td>
<td>44 ± 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Acceptance Nonverbal (13)</td>
<td>2 ± 2</td>
<td>3 ± 3</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Question Verbal (4)</td>
<td>48 ± 18</td>
<td>56 ± 18</td>
<td>50 ± 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Question Nonverbal (14)</td>
<td>2 ± 3</td>
<td>6 ± 4</td>
<td>2 ± 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Instruction Verbal (5)</td>
<td>596 ± 156</td>
<td>621 ± 204</td>
<td>853 ± 232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Instruction Nonverbal (15)</td>
<td>229 ± 89</td>
<td>304 ± 196</td>
<td>443 ± 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Direction Verbal (6)</td>
<td>380 ± 123</td>
<td>292 ± 229</td>
<td>293 ± 161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Direction Nonverbal (16)</td>
<td>18 ± 11</td>
<td>17 ± 13</td>
<td>13 ± 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Criticism Verbal (7)</td>
<td>43 ± 16</td>
<td>44 ± 8</td>
<td>55 ± 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Criticism Nonverbal (17)</td>
<td>2 ± 3</td>
<td>2 ± 2</td>
<td>3 ± 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Predictable Response Verbal (8)</td>
<td>78 ± 58</td>
<td>95 ± 75</td>
<td>43 ± 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Predictable Response Nonverbal (18)</td>
<td>643 ± 94</td>
<td>501 ± 258</td>
<td>514 ± 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Analytical Response Verbal (8)</td>
<td>55 ± 41</td>
<td>33 ± 25</td>
<td>71 ± 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Analytical Response Nonverbal (18)</td>
<td>41 ± 32</td>
<td>45 ± 56</td>
<td>81 ± 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Initiated Question Verbal (9)</td>
<td>44 ± 23</td>
<td>42 ± 32</td>
<td>57 ± 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Initiated Question Nonverbal (19)</td>
<td>6 ± 2</td>
<td>5 ± 4</td>
<td>4 ± 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion (10)</td>
<td>32 ± 18</td>
<td>20 ± 14</td>
<td>21 ± 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence (20)</td>
<td>53 ± 35</td>
<td>51 ± 11</td>
<td>31 ± 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:
Mean ± standard deviation occurrence and percent values for CAFIAS categories according to rank of the instructor: Low (first degree black belt), Mid (second or third degree black belt), and High (fourth degree and above black belt). Values in red are notably different among rank level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALT-PE Domain</th>
<th>Low #</th>
<th>Mid #</th>
<th>High #</th>
<th>Low %</th>
<th>Mid %</th>
<th>High %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wait</td>
<td>5 ± 5</td>
<td>8 ± 4</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>28 ± 13</td>
<td>25 ± 9</td>
<td>19 ± 9</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>30 ± 5</td>
<td>28 ± 20</td>
<td>21 ± 16</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>13 ± 9</td>
<td>6 ± 5</td>
<td>10 ± 9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Pause</td>
<td>0 ± 0</td>
<td>1 ± 2</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Waiting</td>
<td>21 ± 16</td>
<td>11 ± 6</td>
<td>17 ± 5</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Off Task</td>
<td>3 ± 4</td>
<td>0 ± 0</td>
<td>0 ± 0</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Cognitive</td>
<td>45 ± 19</td>
<td>49 ± 35</td>
<td>68 ± 26</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Pause</td>
<td>2 ± 2</td>
<td>4 ± 4</td>
<td>3 ± 1</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Waiting</td>
<td>14 ± 10</td>
<td>19 ± 16</td>
<td>16 ± 8</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Off Task</td>
<td>0 ± 0</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
<td>4 ± 3</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Indirect</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
<td>19 ± 27</td>
<td>28 ± 12</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Motor Inappropriate</td>
<td>3 ± 3</td>
<td>2 ± 1</td>
<td>6 ± 7</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Motor Appropriate (ALT-PE)</td>
<td>88 ± 25</td>
<td>64 ± 23</td>
<td>82 ± 37</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Mean ± standard deviation number of six second periods and percentage of total values for ALT-PE domains according to rank of the instructor: Low (first degree black belt), Mid (second or third degree black belt), and High (fourth degree and above black belt). Values in red are notably different among rank level.
Relationship Between Rank and Instructor Teaching Technique in an Adult Martial Arts Setting
Erik H. Hofmeister, Bryan A. McCullick, Philip D. Tomporowski, and Paul G. Schempp

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAFIAS Category</th>
<th>Partner #</th>
<th>Non-Partner #</th>
<th>Partner %</th>
<th>Non-Partner %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Praise Verbal (2)</td>
<td>81 ± 46</td>
<td>148 ± 65</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Praise Nonverbal (12)</td>
<td>18 ± 12</td>
<td>17 ± 11</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Acceptance Verbal (3)</td>
<td>23 ± 7</td>
<td>40 ± 21</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Acceptance Nonverbal (13)</td>
<td>2 ± 4</td>
<td>2 ± 1</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Question Verbal (4)</td>
<td>42 ± 25</td>
<td>54 ± 17</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Question Nonverbal (14)</td>
<td>4 ± 5</td>
<td>3 ± 2</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Instruction Verbal (5)</td>
<td>941 ± 82</td>
<td>569 ± 122</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Instruction Nonverbal (15)</td>
<td>500 ± 53</td>
<td>237 ± 86</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Direction Verbal (6)</td>
<td>145 ± 106</td>
<td>406 ± 95</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Direction Nonverbal (16)</td>
<td>21 ± 13</td>
<td>14 ± 9</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Criticism Verbal (7)</td>
<td>39 ± 2</td>
<td>50 ± 19</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Criticism Nonverbal (17)</td>
<td>3 ± 3</td>
<td>2 ± 2</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Predictable Response Verbal (8)</td>
<td>24 ± 24</td>
<td>93 ± 51</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Predictable Response Nonverbal (18)</td>
<td>394 ± 223</td>
<td>634 ± 75</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Analytical Response Verbal (8))</td>
<td>49 ± 35</td>
<td>55 ± 45</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Analytical Response Nonverbal (18))</td>
<td>31 ± 19</td>
<td>64 ± 57</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Initiated Question Verbal (9)</td>
<td>55 ± 29</td>
<td>44 ± 26</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Initiated Question Nonverbal (19)</td>
<td>4 ± 5</td>
<td>5 ± 3</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion (10)</td>
<td>17 ± 7</td>
<td>29 ± 15</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence (20)</td>
<td>41 ± 17</td>
<td>48 ± 27</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5:
Mean ± standard deviation occurrence and percent values for CAFIAS categories according to type of class: partner or non partner. Values in red are notably different between types of class.
Relationship Between Rank and Instructor Teaching Technique in an Adult Martial Arts Setting
Erik H. Hofmeister, Bryan A. McCullick, Philip D. Tomporowski, and Paul G. Schempp

Table 6:
Mean ± standard deviation number of six second periods and percent values for ALT-PE domains according to type of class: partner or non-partner. Values in red are notably different between types of class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALT-PE Domain</th>
<th>Partner #</th>
<th>Non-Partner #</th>
<th>Partner %</th>
<th>Non-Partner %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wait</td>
<td>1 ± 2</td>
<td>6 ± 5</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>14 ± 3</td>
<td>29 ± 9</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>16 ± 19</td>
<td>31 ± 8</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>7 ± 11</td>
<td>12 ± 7</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Pause</td>
<td>1 ± 1</td>
<td>1 ± 2</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Waiting</td>
<td>17 ± 5</td>
<td>17 ± 13</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Off Task</td>
<td>0 ± 0</td>
<td>2 ± 3</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge – Cognitive</td>
<td>85 ± 5</td>
<td>40 ± 16</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Pause</td>
<td>3 ± 2</td>
<td>2 ± 3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Waiting</td>
<td>14 ± 8</td>
<td>17 ± 12</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Off Task</td>
<td>2 ± 3</td>
<td>1 ± 2</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Indirect</td>
<td>40 ± 9</td>
<td>3 ± 6</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Motor Inappropriate</td>
<td>5 ± 7</td>
<td>3 ± 2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice – Motor Appropriate (ALT-PE)</td>
<td>53 ± 15</td>
<td>90 ± 24</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

Several statistically significant relationships between CAFIAS categories and response patterns were found with ALT-PE domains. The category of teacher verbal behavior and the pattern of teacher verbal (lecture) was positively associated with the cognitive engagement domain. This reflects the instructor lecturing to the students and each system is measuring a similar construct. The relationship is not perfect, possibly because of the time sampling method or because of the slight differences in the construct. The ALT-PE system uses a six-second interval whereas the CAFIAS uses a three-second interval, or when the behavior changes. The CAFIAS teacher verbal category is scored regardless of if an individual student is attentive or not, whereas the ALT-PE cognitive engagement domain is only scored if the student appears to be cognitively engaged. Teacher verbal behavior was also positively associated with the motor indirect domain whereas teacher nonverbal behavior was negatively associated with the motor indirect domain. Those classes which were partner in nature involved more motor indirect activities and were also more lecture-based with less teacher demonstration, which may explain this relationship. A robust qualitative analysis would be needed to establish the nature of this relationship. Teacher verbal and teacher nonverbal was negatively associated with the transition domain. It is possible those classes which had more instruction had fewer transitions as the activities remained more static. To confirm this, the number of different activities conducted during a lesson would be counted, which was beyond the scope of this study.

Student predictable verbal response was negatively associated with motor indirect and cognitive engagement domains. Predictable verbal responses were usually in the response of a call back to a command by the instructor associated with drills. For example, when the instructor calls the name of the form, ‘Kihon kata shodan’, the students verbally repeat the name to indicate they know the form they are about to do, ‘Kihon kata shodan’. Those classes which focused on drills did not have partner work and did not involve as much lecture as classes with less drill work. Other studies have found that teachers who reduce partner work and cognitive engagement time increase the amount of time students are engaged in physical activity [Walker 1990, Randall 1989]. Student predictable nonverbal response as well as the pattern of teacher command and student predictable nonverbal response were negatively associated with motor indirect, supporting the finding that rote drill work was likely to be non-partner-based and did not involve as much teacher lecture.

CAFIAS categories share some characteristics with ALT-PE domains as demonstrated in this study. The CAFIAS measures the interaction between the instructor and the students Cheffers [1980] argues, which
does not provide information about what the students are doing. The ALT-PE system measures student activity [Metzler 1989: 225] but does not provide information about teacher activities or interactions. Using both in this study provides more complete data to understand instructional activities during the classes recorded. No other studies directly comparing the CAFIAS and ALT-PE system have been found. However, studies comparing teacher behavior with other systems and the ALT-PE system have documented that teacher behavior has relationships with ALT-PE domains [Hastie 1994, LaMaster 1993, Phillips 1983].

Although no statistical tests were applied to analyze difference among instructors according to rank, some apparent differences were evident and worthy of discussion. Instructors in the High rank group had appreciably less wait and transition time than instructors in the Low or Mid rank groups. Wait and transition time is presumably an undesirable use of classroom time, and studies have shown than interventions aimed at educating teachers can reduce wait and transition time [Hart 1983]. More effective teachers have been shown to spend less time on organizational tasks, such as waiting and transition, than less effective teachers [Phillips 1983]. This finding supports the hypothesis that High ranked instructors are more effective managers of the class time than instructors of Low or Mid rank.

Instructors in the High and Mid rank groups had appreciably more time with students cognitively engaged than instructors in the Low rank group. This may be attributed to the type of class run by each instructor. High ranked instructors spent more time lecturing (verbal instruction) than Mid ranked instructors, who spent more time lecturing than Low ranked instructors. High and Mid ranked instructors also spent more time demonstrating, with students observing and being cognitively engaged. One study documented more cognitive engagement by eight elementary physical education teachers (experienced, analogous to the High or Mid rank instructors) than eight elementary teachers in training (inexperienced, analogous to the Low rank instructors) [Griffey 1991].

Instructors in the High rank group elicited less predictable student verbal and non-verbal responses and stimulated more student analytical nonverbal response than instructors in the Low or Mid rank groups. This suggests that the classes of High rank instructors had better communication, encouraging students to participate in creative ways, which is similar to expert golf instructors [Schempp 2004]. Coaches of more satisfied basketball teams similarly created environments where creative student responses were more likely than with coaches of less satisfied teams [Fisher 1982]. Experienced physical education teachers also give more affective praise [Tan 1996].

Instructors in the High rank group had less silence than instructors in the Low and Mid rank groups. Silence is rare in modern martial arts classes except for an optional brief period of meditation at the beginning and end of class [Vertonghen 2012]. Instructors in the Low and Mid rank groups often incurred silence while they were considering the next class activity. In classes where teachers had one hour to plan a lesson versus 2 minutes, less silence has been observed [Imwold 1984]. It is possible that High rank instructors planned their lesson in more detail than the others, or their greater experience allowed them to adapt quickly to the class with minimal planning [Graham 1993, Griffey 1991, Kim 2010, Tan 1996]. Similarly, instructors in the Low rank group had more confusion than instructors in the Mid and High rank groups. This may reflect a lack of experience in managing the class when unanticipated events occur or not having a ready lesson plan, as Graham [1993] argues.

Instructors in the Low rank group had virtually no motor indirect time, indicating they rarely used partner exercises. Martial arts forms are typically conducted as individual student activities [Hopkins 2005]. Creating drills and opportunities for student to student interaction in the context of improving forms may require more experience as an instructor [Graham 1993]. Alternatively, the Low rank group may have been more focused on a traditional practice-mastery based class while the Mid and High rank groups may have focused on refining techniques already known through partner work.

Instructors in the Low rank group had more teacher verbal direction than instructors in the Mid and High rank groups. This is consistent with a direct instruction model that Metzler [2011] highlights where the instructor retains tight control over the class and gives orders expecting them to be followed precisely. This is also consistent with findings in coaches, where less successful coaches had a more direct coaching style [Rotsko 1979].

ALT-PE was not different among instructor rank groups. A lack of difference in ALT-PE between specialist teachers and classroom teachers delivering physical education classes has been documented previously [Placek 1986]. In that study, it was hypothesized that specialist instructors may select more appropriate tasks for the students without necessarily affecting their motor engagement time. van der Mars [1995] study showed no difference in ALT-PE between novice and expert physical education teachers hypothesized that the system may not be sensitive enough to detect differences in pedagogical approach. It is possible that the ALT-PE, while well correlated with student psychomotor skill acquisition [Ko 1986, Silverman 1985, Shaffner 1986], may not be capturing the full spectrum of knowledge students acquire in a physical skills class [Dodds 1994]. Therefore, the lack of difference between among instructor rank groups in ALT-PE relationships with ALT-PE domains [Hastie 1994, LaMaster 1993, Phillips 1983].

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may not indicate that student achievement between them would also be equivalent.

Differences in instructor behaviors were noted among Low, Mid, and High ranked instructors. Low ranked instructors led classes in a direct instruction model without partner work and with many opportunities for practice. Mid ranked instructors led classes with more cognitive engagement than the Low ranked instructors but lacking the classroom management skills of the High ranked instructors. High ranked instructors led classes with less wait and transition time, less silence, more cognitive engagement time, and more elaborate student engagement. These findings support the hypothesis that High ranked instructors display characteristics consistent with being more skilled teachers than Mid ranked instructors, and that Mid ranked instructors display characteristics consistent with being more skilled teachers than Low ranked instructors.

Although all the instructors in this study had engaged in several teaching skills workshops for local martial artists, none were trained in physical education pedagogy in a formal setting, such as a university. It was expected that their teaching perspective came from the apprenticeship of observation as Schempp [1989] observes, student feedback, and self-reflection [Gilbert 2001]. The apprenticeship of observation is when a teacher’s experience with teaching is shaped by their experience as a student. In martial arts, training is usually informal, like sports coaching [Mallett 2009]. In martial arts, acquisition of experience and content knowledge is the only route for improvement of pedagogical skill for most martial artists, as there are few formal teacher training programs. Because all the instructors in this study participated in the same instructor training course, they had been exposed to similar pedagogical methods in a didactic setting. Therefore, the differences observed can be more directly attributed to the differences in instructor rank. However, it is possible that higher ranked, more experienced instructors, were able to derive different information from the training courses than lower ranked instructors.

Several studies have documented that improving content knowledge improves pedagogical practice. In one, physical education teachers given a four-hour workshop on badminton showed improved student performance and pedagogical techniques compared with their teaching before the workshop [Ward 2015]. In another study, physical education teachers reported that their pedagogical activities in non-expert sports was less developed than their activities in sports in which they had expertise [Schempp 1998]. The findings from our study support those from the literature, where pedagogical technique improved progressively as a function of time in practice and continued acquisition of content knowledge between Low, Mid, and High ranked instructors.

During data analysis, it became evident that classes taught with regular use of partners produced noted differences from classes taught without partners. Most obvious was the difference in motor indirect—those classes with partners had dramatically higher motor indirect. Based on this observation, a comparison of these two class structures was warranted.

Non-partner classes had more teacher praise than partner classes. Behavior-specific praise is considered to be slightly effective for changing student behavior, whereas general praise has no effect [Brophy 1981]. The CAFIAS system does not distinguish between general praise and behavior-specific praise [Floress 2017]. Students in non-partner classes had more predictable verbal and nonverbal responses, analytical nonverbal responses, and ALT-PE. These students were more physically active, possibly creating more opportunities for the instructor to provide praise as feedback. The students may have also been responding predictably to the regular teacher direction given, which was much higher in non-partner classes than partner classes, and this created a sense of positive affect in the instructor, which prompted them to utter positive statements as Brophy [1981] observed.

Students in non-partner classes spent more time in transition, management, and rest than students in partner classes. This is consistent with the result that instructors gave more directions in non-partner classes. More rest time may have been necessary due to the higher intensity nature of the non-partner classes; in partner classes, one member of the pair is assisting rather than executing, creating natural rest periods. Transition and management may have been higher in non-partner classes due to a need to create more types of exercises [Oh 2014]. More instructor directions may have been given since the non-partner forms classes were traditionally conducted with the instructor giving a count for each move, whereas partner forms classes proceed without the instructor giving a count for students to progress to the next step.

Students in partner classes receive far more cognitive engagement, teacher talk, and teacher nonverbal instruction than students in non-partner classes. All of these are consistent with a more lecture-based class, typical of a partner form, possibly due to the complexity of the movements required of forms using a partner [De Cree 2013]. As expected, students in partner classes had dramatically more motor indirect time than students in non-partner classes.

Students in non-partner classes had higher ALT-PE than students in partner classes. Within the two schools involved in this study, the minimum time required to earn a black belt in a striking art (e.g. karate) is 3 years, and the minimum time required to earn a black belt in a
throwing art (e.g., aikido) is 5 years. This disparity may be explained by the relative ALT-PE of partner (throwing art) and non-partner (striking art) classes. In partner class, much of the time is spent in support of the primary learner, so the assisting partner is not actively engaged in learning. It is possible that the longer time to earn the same rank is due to this lower ALT-PE in partner classes. Involvement of a partner is required, as without a partner learning throwing technique is not as effective [Gomes 2002]. In one study of physical education teachers undertaken by Walker [1990] an increase in ALT-PE was achieved partly by reducing partner work.

CONCLUSION

No interaction system has been applied to collecting systematic observational data about a martial arts class. The CAFIAS was chosen as the most relevant system for evaluating teacher-student interactions in a psychomotor skills acquisition setting. No study comparing the teaching behaviors based on the experience level of the martial artist, as defined by their rank level, has been conducted. The ALT-PE system was selected because it has a rich history of research use and validation and has been used in other studies comparing teachers of varying levels. This would allow for comparisons between the findings of this study and previous studies. No study could be found which used both the CAFIAS and ALT-PE system, and the opportunity to compare results from two systems with a rich history of use in research was novel.

The study had several strengths. While participants for this study were selected on the basis of convenience and knowledge of the two schools involved in the study, all completed a certified instructor training course (CIT), which equated them on knowledge content. Thus, rank-related differences in instruction can be attributed to instructor’s past and experiences and the ability to translate the knowledge into practice. There were more than eight martial arts schools in the urban setting at the time of this study. The schools chosen had a relationship with the author and could be relied upon to participate. Furthermore, the author knew the capabilities of the participants, types of classes, and physical layout of the schools which participated. Another strength was the use of quantitative observation methods in the form of the CAFIAS and the ALT-PE system. Observations which may have been of a qualitative nature may have helped inform interpretation of the quantitative results.

A single observer performed coding of the videos for CAFIAS and the ALT-PE system. It is possible personal bias may have been reduced by using more than one observer. However, including more than one observer would have introduced inter-observer variability and may have resulted in lower intra-observer reliability. The extremely high intra-observer correlation in this study suggests that, if personal bias was present, it was consistently applied.

Limitations of the study include its small sample size and corresponding data analysis challenges. Using a larger sample from a varied number of martial arts schools would allow for statistical comparisons to be made and results to be extrapolated to the general population. Similarly, these results may not be applicable to settings outside of the United States. Adding a qualitative systematic observation would provide more data to put the results in context. Comparing student skill acquisition in partner and non-partner classes may improve understanding in the difference in skill and rank advancement between partner martial arts (e.g., judo, aikido) and non-partner martial arts (e.g., karate, Kyuki-Do). Comparing martial arts teachers who have and have not had any formal teacher training would help determine the usefulness of such training.

A further limitation is that participants were given little direction with regards to the class to be taught. There was variability in warm up time and type of class taught, and this variability was inconsistent across rank levels. It is possible this additional variability introduced bias into the results. Selecting instructors who taught the same type of class (e.g. all non-partner) and providing more specific direction about warm-up time may have minimized this variability. Participants volunteered to participate, and this may have created a selection bias towards instructors who were more comfortable being recorded. It is possible lower-performing instructors did not volunteer and the data may not reflect all instructors at the selected schools.

In summary, the result suggest that instructors of Low rank should practice transitioning their instructional strategy from a direct instruction method to a more dynamic, communicative structure using more teacher instruction, encouraging thoughtful responses in students, and fewer direct commands. Instructors of Mid rank should consider engaging in more planning activities in order to minimize the amount of classroom time spent in silence, waiting, or in transition. Instructors of High rank displays characteristics consistent with proficient and expert teachers and should continue to teach classes as they have been.
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ABSTRACT

Given the scarcity of psychological research examining female participation in boxing, the present study sought to provide a bottom-up perspective of female amateur boxers’ experiences of the challenges of competing and the strategies employed to overcome them. This study also aimed to provide specific policy recommendations to facilitate developmental opportunities for female boxers. To achieve these aims, phenomenological interviews were conducted with eight elite British female amateur boxers examining the early, middle and later years of their careers. Following an inductive content analysis, the findings revealed that the boxers experienced similar challenges and employed various strategies to deal with these barriers. Explicit policy recommendations have been provided, such as the provision of a women’s boxing programme at the elite level and an increase in media promotion of women’s boxing, which may help governing bodies to support female amateur boxers. Future research examining the perceptions of those who support the boxers (i.e., coaches, parents and sport science/medicine support practitioners) would provide a more holistic evaluation of female boxers’ lived experiences and help to articulate how best to support them throughout their careers.

CONTRIBUTORS

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NAVIGATING THE ROCKY ROAD: ELITE FEMALE BOXERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR BOXING JOURNEY

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Boxing, female boxers, challenges, strategies, martial arts

CITATION


In spite of gender stereotypes and various barriers, female athletes around the world have challenged the system, acted against societal norms, and created new concepts of womanhood through participation in male dominated sports [Knapp 2014]. Levy’s [2002: 120] qualitative research focusing on the personal meaning of competition for nine female mountain bike racers indicated that it is a way of self-discovery, self-acceptance and a source of empowerment, enabling women to break the gender stereotype and serve as a role model for other females. Moreover, Ming et al. [2016: 38] explored how twelve female athletes experienced, interpreted, accepted, tolerated and resisted the contradictory role adopted through participation in power and performance sports such as rugby, boxing and MMA, with findings demonstrating that participants enjoyed the physical intensity and mental strength associated with these sports. In combat sports more widely, sex-integration has been investigated [Channon 2014], in addition to the gendered significance of women’s participation in combat sports [Channon and Phipps 2017] and women’s participation in mixed martial arts in Norway and Sweden [Alsarve and Tjønndal 2019], to name just a few.

Boxing is defined as an individual sport whereby the direct aim of each boxer is to land punches on the target areas of the opposition [Lane 2008]. Although female participation in boxing is banned in some countries (e.g., Islamic Republic of Iran), other cultures have embraced and accepted the involvement of females in boxing. The conditions of female participation in boxing and sport generally, may vary considerably by culture [Turpeinen, Jaako, Kankaanpää and Hakamäki 2012]. For example, boxing in Canada has one of the most varied athletic populations in terms of nationality, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational status, sexual preference, language, and immigrant status [Schinke, Stambulova, Trepanier and Odirin 2015]. Boxers are often attracted to the sport as a way of achieving a ‘better life’ on various sociocultural levels, with some having experienced ongoing forms of identity marginalisation [Schinke et al 2015]. Furthermore, female participation in boxing in the United Kingdom (UK) has been on the rise since the inclusion of female boxing in the 2012 Olympics. The Great Britain (GB) Boxing Association reported that the 2012 Olympics inspired a surge in female boxing with numbers increasing by 50% from 23,300 (October 2011–October 2012) to 35,100 (April 2012–April 2013), with 18.5% of all participants in boxing being females [Great Britain Boxing n.d.].

Despite this increase, stereotypes about what is socially acceptable have influenced how female athletes are perceived [Ross and Shinew 2008: 50]. With this point in mind, Jackson and Marsh [1986: 198] suggested that qualities such as physical strength, competitiveness, determination, aggressiveness and tough-mindedness are considered to be masculine;
however, these are necessary to be a successful athlete in many sports, irrespective of gender. Regardless, these are traits frequently associated with hegemonic masculinity, an institutionally privileged and dominant masculinity for men. Coakley [2009] therefore implied that males tend to participate in power and performance sports which require these traditionally masculine qualities.

Specific to boxing, the majority of sport psychology research has tended to focus on men’s experiences, examining training practices and weight reduction leading up to a fight [Simpson and Wrisberg 2013; Morton, Robertson, Sutton and MacLaren 2010], boxers’ progressions through the 2013–2016 Olympic cycle [Schinke, Stambulova, Trepianer and Oghene 2015], as well as performance analysis [Davis, Benson, Pitty, Connorton and Waldock 2015]. More recently, Bonhomme, Seanor, Schinke and Stambulova [2018] examined the career development of two male world champion boxers, and identified five developmental stages of amateur to professional boxing, namely: (1) weathering the hardships of early life, (2) entry into sport, (3) amateur experience, (4) launching a professional career, and (5) capturing a world title. However, such experiences and career development studies have rarely been examined from a female boxer’s perspective and thus our understanding of the female boxer remains incomplete.

Regarding female boxing more broadly, this is an emerging (but still limited) research area. Previous studies have explored the challenges women have faced in professional boxing [Halbert 1997], female boxers’ experiences of gender construction [Carlsson 2017], and their reduced opportunities and disadvantages [Cove and Young 2007] compared to their male counterparts. More recently, Tjønndal [2019a] explored the lived experiences of coaches and athletes in Norwegian Olympic boxing, as well as the innovation, inclusion and exclusion in women’s Olympic boxing [Tjønndal 2019b]. Despite these valuable studies, from a sport psychology perspective, our understanding of the challenges female boxers face as well as strategies they have found effective in dealing with challenges across their sporting life span is limited. McGannon, Schinke, Ge and Blodgett [2018] investigated a related field in exploring women’s identities in relation to inclusion and marginalisation in the Canadian National Boxing Team; however, the primary focus of their study was not in identifying the key strategies and challenges faced.

Further examination of female athletes’ experiences in sports is warranted, specifically on the barriers experienced by female boxers in different geographical areas around the world [Tjønndal 2019a]. This would also improve our understanding of ensuring equal participation for men and women in boxing globally [Tjønndal 2019b: 143]. Within the last decade female boxing in Britain has increased with the help of boxing clubs and coaches [England Boxing n.d.], as well as the boxes taking initiative to help themselves progress. This rise reflects a changing climate towards the acceptance of female participation in amateur boxing, which this study seeks to more fully understand by examining the experiences of eight elite female amateur boxers. Such understanding may also lead to specific policy recommendations for improved opportunities for female amateur boxers. Using qualitative research and an epistemological and methodological approach used in many boxing studies [Tjønndal 2019a; Tjønndal 2019b], the aim of this research will be to investigate this phenomenon from a sport psychology standpoint to firstly acknowledge the challenges female elite amateur boxers face, then provide beneficial strategies which boxers and combat sports athletes may choose to utilise to deal with challenges and help enhance their performance. Lastly, this study intends to outline policy recommendations to facilitate developmental opportunities for female amateur boxers. This unique focus will provide coaches, support staff, parents and female athletes with valuable knowledge to inform how best to approach the sport, deal with the various inevitable challenges and reach their full potential.

METHODS

Participants

Eight elite female amateur boxers (age range = 22-37 years; $M_{\text{age}} = 30.3$, SD = 5.1) from the current and previous (retired boxers) England and GB boxing team consented to participate in the study. The boxers’ careers ranged from three to 28 years ($M_{\text{experience}} = 6.5$ years), and 17 to 78 competitive bouts (fights; $M_{\text{fights}} = 34.4$). Demographic information is provided in Table 1 overleaf. Individuals competed between the weight categories of 51 kilograms to 69 kilograms, with two athletes selected for the Olympic games.

Phenomenological Interviews

Empirical phenomenology was chosen in the present study to create rich, detailed accounts of boxers’ lived experiences in each domain [Allen-Collinson 2011]. Phenomenological interviews enable the collection of in-depth and expressive information, exploring the
experiences of participants [Allen-Collinson 2011] and draws a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. While other qualitative and quantitative approaches seek to understand how or why a phenomenon occurs, empirical phenomenology describes what participants experience [Nesti 2004], via the exploration of their thoughts and feelings. Due to the nature of phenomenological interviews, the conversation between the researcher and participant tends to be open and conversational, thus allowing the freedom to explore evolving concepts, rather than being limited by a strict schedule [Potter and Hepburn 2005]. As suggested by Sparkes and Smith [2014], the researcher must establish rapport and empathy, when appropriate, in order to build trusting relationships with participants, yet remain mindful of over-rapport and over-looking issues that need to be problematised. Following Sparkes and Smith’s [2014] recommendations, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author to allow the boxers to discuss their experiences in totality [Giorgi and Giorgi 2003]. As a result of the researcher’s sporting background as a female amateur boxer, she was able to relate and empathise with some of the mentioned challenges during each interview.

Materials

Ethical approval was gained from the Institutional Ethics committee of the first author. Thereafter, pilot interviews were conducted to ensure the appropriateness, feasibility and suitability of the interview questions in helping to answer the study aims [Van Teijlingen & Hundley 2002]. The ‘interview schedule’1 was carefully developed to allow each participant to freely discuss and elaborate on their experiences of boxing, in training and competitions. Drawing upon Connaughton, Hanton and Jones’s [2010] four specific career phases of elite athletes and approaches adopted by Giacobbi et al. [2004], the interview schedule was split into four sections beginning with an introduction to familiarise the participants with the nature and confidentiality of the study followed by an examination of the challenges experienced during the early (second section), middle (third section) and later years (fourth section) of boxers’ careers. As each career phase was discussed, the strategies that each boxer employed were also discussed. The early (novice) years referred to the start of the participant’s boxing career and their experience of competing in their first bout. The middle (developmental) years referred to the participant’s experience of gaining competition experience beyond the first competitive bout, whilst the later (elite) years referred to boxers’ experience of competing in national and international competitions and typically competing in 15 or more bouts.

1. The schedule is available from the first author on request Shakiba.Moghadam@port.ac.uk

Procedures

The participants were recruited from various Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) registered boxing gyms around the UK through personal contacts with the directors of the England team. Participants had to be over the age of 18 years old and had previous or current experience of competing for the England or the GB squad. The researcher contacted each participant via an invitation email providing them with a detailed information briefing sheet and inviting them to participate. Eight out of 11 elite female boxers responded to the invitation email. All participants were assured of the confidentiality of their interviews and notified that they could withdraw themselves or their transcript at any point. Once informed consent was obtained, the first author organised a suitable time and place to conduct the interview. Due to the geographical location of each participant, five of the interviews were conducted via Skype. Following Hanna’s [2012: 240] recommendations, an upgraded version of Skype was used to allow enhanced visual and audio interaction between the participant and researcher. A brief introduction from the researcher helped in familiarising the boxer with the nature and purpose of the study. Following this briefing, interviews were conducted, and audio recorded using a dictaphone, lasting an average of 72 minutes (range: 37 to 108 minutes). Once the interviews were completed, the participants were debriefed and re-informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

In line with previous work [Didymus 2017; Phillippi and Lauderdale 2018], all interviews were transcribed verbatim including pauses, addition of line and page numbers and field notes to record the emotional responses and body language of participants. All transcripts were anonymised by changing participants’ names to pseudonyms.

As recommended by previous research [Giorgi and Giorgi 2008], each interview was separately inductively content analysed using an iterative process to identify meaning units (i.e., words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs [Weston, Thelwell, Bond and Hutchings 2009]) relating first to the challenges experienced by each participant, and second as to the strategies employed by each participant to overcome such challenges. The challenges and employed strategies were analysed separately for the early, middle and later years of boxers’ boxing lifecycle. In agreement with previous research [Alexander et al. 2016], the researcher highlighted portions of raw text which illustrated various challenges and employed strategies, and took note of prominent concepts within each transcript. This process was then repeated for the early, middle and later years. Each phase was allocated with a specific highlighted colour,
The boxer’s responses identified 94 raw data challenges in the early years, which were categorised into 13 first order themes, five second order themes and two general dimensions. Likewise, the employed strategies for the early years collated 43 raw data strategies, seven first order themes, three second order themes, three general dimensions and five strategy themes in total. Responses for the middle years gathered 70 raw data challenges, nine first order themes, six second order themes and two general dimensions. The corresponding middle years employed strategies assembled 39 raw data strategies, five first order themes, three second order themes, two general dimensions and five strategy themes in total. Lastly, the later years revealed 98 raw data challenges, nine first order themes, five second order themes and two general dimensions with 42 raw data strategies, five first order themes, four second order themes, two general dimensions and five strategy themes in total.

Table 2 illustrates the strategies that were employed to overcome the specific challenges experienced in each phase of the participant’s boxing lifecycle. The results are presented in line with the approach adopted by Connaughton et al. [2010] and Didymus [2017].

Challenges and Employed Strategies in the Early Years

Difficulties of competing as a female boxer.
The difficulty of competing as a female boxer was a mutual challenge experienced by all athletes in the early years. All interviews alluded to the preconception of female boxers, for instance, the comments and judgements made by friends, boxing fans and coaches. Boxers described comments made by others to be degrading and at times demotivating, with Hayley and Lauren stating: ‘It wasn’t appropriate for women to be there [boxing gyms]’, ‘I think [female boxing] still isn’t easy for people to comprehend and accept’. It was within this theme too that the athletes expressed the commonality of experiencing stereotypical, racist and sexist comments about their choice to compete in boxing. Gemma expressed her frustration about other peoples’ assumptions of her sexuality based on the sport she participated in: ‘I get annoyed when people assume my sexuality because of the sport I participate in and my pursuits, I don’t care if they think I’m gay, I’m not but they just assume it’. Similarly, Amy described her experience of sexist comments at school due to her participation in boxing: ‘I was so different to them [girls at school] they kept saying I was a boy and I wanted to be a boy’.

In line with these challenges, several boxers mentioned the dislike of boxing within their family, where being a woman was construed as incompatible with being a boxer. Lauren noted: ‘She [mother] was like it’s about time you started acting like a girl, she obviously didn’t like it [boxing]’ and further expressed that her mother never supported her involvement or achievements in boxing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age (years; time of interview)</th>
<th>Number of bouts</th>
<th>Career length (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayley</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgie</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Participant’s Demographic Information

RESULTS

The boxer’s responses identified 94 raw data challenges in the early years, which were categorised into 13 first order themes, five second order themes and two general dimensions. Likewise, the employed strategies for the early years collated 43 raw data strategies, seven first order themes, three second order themes, three general dimensions and five strategy themes in total. Responses for the middle years gathered 70 raw data challenges, nine first order themes, six second order themes and two general dimensions. The corresponding middle years employed strategies assembled 39 raw data strategies, five first order themes, three second order themes, two general dimensions and five strategy themes in total. Lastly, the later years revealed 98 raw data challenges, nine first order themes, five second order themes and two general dimensions with 42 raw data strategies, five first order themes, four second order themes, two general dimensions and five strategy themes in total.

Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam, Catherine Phipps, Richard Thelwell and Neil Weston

Elite Female Boxers’ Perceptions of Their Boxing Journey

To ensure reliability and avoid bias, two other trained researchers worked in isolation to independently code the data without negotiation [Smith and McGannon 2017]. Thereafter, the triangulation procedure enabled all researchers to compare codes and discuss any inconsistencies. Subsequently, the first author utilised member checking as a way of involving the participants to assess the trustworthiness of the findings and thus validate the credibility of the results. In practice, this involved all transcribed interviews and results (i.e., themes) being provided to the participants who were then asked to reflect upon the analysis of their commentary [Smith and McGannon 2017]. All participants confirmed they were satisfied with the accuracy of analysis.
Despite these barriers, the athletes were intent on pursuing their passion in boxing; the boxers emphasised how important it was to challenge negative comments and rephrase negative statements to positive actions such as training harder and proving people wrong. Georgie explained the difficulty of dealing with negative comments from her coach and fellow male boxers: ‘I had to be determined and ignore everybody around me when they [coach and fellow male boxers] were being negative towards me’, whilst Hannah depicted a similar struggle: ‘After he [coach] told me I shouldn’t be boxing, I was so determined to prove him wrong, if they [other male boxers] made any negative comments I just had to take it on the chin and prove them wrong’. Moreover, Gemma and Sarah explained: ‘In the championships the only bouts that were covered were some of the female Olympic weight bouts and all the other male fights, that’s not fair’ and ‘In the boxing magazines there were descriptions of the men’s fights, yet nothing on the first ever female title fight, the media don’t promote female boxers like male boxing’. The boxers expressed the need for media attention to promote and normalise female amateur boxing as a positive sport to engage in, potentially increasing acceptance of female boxing in wider society.

Some boxers depicted their early years’ experience as having to prove themselves despite being ignored at various gyms, with Zoe quoting: ‘[Going into a gym] it’s not comfortable, I mean you’re not there to box you’re there to prove yourself’. Gemma explained how disgraced she was at the language used during a training session: ‘The language they [coaches] use in some gyms not swearing but saying to everyone to stop punching like you’re a p**** or you did that press up like a little h****, I’ve heard them things when I’ve been training and it’s so rude and we’re very accepting as a society in terms of jokes and derogatory comments towards women’.

**Lack of support from the governing body.**

Another challenge in the early years was the lack of will from the governing body to allow females to box. Gemma and Georgie described their frustration on the ban on female boxing during the early years of their boxing careers: ‘I couldn’t compete because it was illegal for women to box, it wasn’t fair’, ‘All I wanted was to compete but I couldn’t get licenced’. As members of the England female squad, some of the participants described their anxiety at competing nationally and internationally as novice boxers (under three bouts) as no strict regulations were in place for female competitors, with Sarah describing her first experience at a national competition as disorganised. She further explained: ‘During the championships when it came to our [female boxers] competition everyone started packing away, including the officials’. The athlete’s disparity in competition experience in comparison to their foreign opponents resulted from a difficulty in finding appropriate female sparring partners. Consequently, the females often sparred with heavier, elite male boxers to compensate for the lack of sparring and experience. That being said, some boxers indicated that they had received substantial support from their coaches and teammates, where some coaches would organise periodised training to suit their boxers’ ability. Zoe noted: ‘I had the support of my coach when others didn’t believe in me, you have to develop that trust with your coach’, whilst Amy discussed the encouragement of her teammates: ‘I don’t have the support of my biological family in boxing but I’ve got the support of my boxing family in the gym’.

**Challenges and Employed Strategies in the Middle Years**

**Lack of support and opportunity for female boxers.**

Although the boxers acknowledged the difficulties of competing as a female amateur boxer, many struggled to get noticed in boxing due to limited opportunities and promotion of female amateur boxing. Most boxers stressed the potential health problems associated with limited (51kg, 60kg and 75kg) weight categories at the elite/Olympic level, particularly for the younger generation: ‘There are three weight categories for females in comparison to men and I think that really encourages unhealthy practices for women because you have to fall into those three categories, especially with young girls coming through now and forcing themselves to fall within those three categories. You just think at your age you’re going to start so many problems’ (Georgie). The boxers felt extremely frustrated as non-Olympic weights were neglected, consequently competitive boxers had no goal to aim for if they did not qualify for the eligible weight categories, bearing in mind each category differed by 11 or more kilograms. The frustration also stemmed from the lack of equal opportunities for female boxers in comparison to their male counterparts; unlike female boxers, male boxers have the opportunity to compete at 10 weight categories with a difference of four kilograms between each category. Hannah stated: ‘We [female boxers] just don’t get the same amount of attention’, whilst Hayley described the effect of the limited weight categories on boxers that qualified for non-Olympic weight categories: ‘The governing body neglected the vast majority of women’s boxing in the country, they don’t focus on any other females that doesn’t fall in the three Olympic weight categories’.

The boxers noted that representing their country in championships, nationally and internationally, was governed by self-funding and arranging time off work, with no support from the governing body, boxing clubs or sponsorships. In contrast male boxers who competed in championships or international competitions were typically supported by their club or a form of sponsorship. Under such circumstances the boxers emphasised the importance of focusing their time and efforts on...
developing their boxing skills and training to the best of their ability. However, most female boxers did not have the opportunity to spar with females similar in weight and experience. Zoe described her experience of sparring with various male boxers, including professional boxers, to develop her speed and accuracy despite her sparring partners weighing 10 kilograms heavier than her, quoting: ‘My sparring partner is bigger but he pushes me and everyone there sees the potential, sees what you’ve achieved. They want to help towards pushing you further’.

Lauren explained the sacrifice of neglecting her relationship and social life because of competitions and training, stating: ‘My biggest struggle has been my relationship, it emasculated him [partner] a little. He was also just unhappy, he didn’t get to see me and came to resent boxing for taking me away from him’. This suggests female boxers walk a tightrope between their social life and sport performance as well as dealing with sexist views of gender roles. For some boxers, participating in boxing negatively influential their relationship and available social support. The importance of prioritising responsibilities was a common strategy which also led to scheduling training around family and social events. In turn, the boxers felt scheduling training times enabled them to create a balance between boxing, social life and commitment to relationships.

Developing an unhealthy relationship with food.

Considering the physical demands of training several times a day, the boxers explained the transition of training intensely and feeling more fatigued, with some boxers drastically altering their weight category, which proved to be another major challenge. Hayley quoted: ‘I couldn’t maintain the weight, I wasn’t eating anything, not drinking much, mostly dehydrated’, with Georgie echoing similar struggles: ‘I lived on replacement shakes, it was pretty miserable’. These boxers eventually adhered to unhealthy weight maintenance strategies (i.e., starvation) due to the limited weight categories, with one boxer reducing her weight by six kilograms in six weeks so she could be considered for the GB team. Some boxers further elaborated on the limited weight categories and explained that weight reduction led to serious problems such as osteoporosis: ‘I just couldn’t deal with it [reducing weight], psychologically and physically I just couldn’t maintain the weight’ (Georgie), with Hannah and Gemma describing the detrimental effects: ‘Osteoporosis had kicked in and I adapted to disordered eating. I just had to withdraw myself from training’, ‘Things [reproductive system] started to go pretty wrong’. Previous research has found that persistent attention directed to body mass control increases the possibility of eating disorders (e.g., anorexia, bulimia) with higher risk among female athletes [Coelho, Gomes, Ribeiro and Soares 2014]. In addition to this, regular participation in strenuous physical exercise can affect reproductive function and lead to menstrual disturbances within female athletes [Franchini, Brito and Artioli 2012]. Consequently, as a way to deal with drastic weight loss, the boxers discussed the significance of alternating their diet gradually and carefully to achieve a certain weight. Additionally, modifying training so that exercises were boxing specific (i.e., three-minute rounds, shadow boxing) was also an employed strategy to enhance their skills as well as aid their weight loss.

Challenges and Employed Strategies in the Later Years

Several challenges experienced in the middle years followed through into the later years such as lack of support and organisational issues.

Dealing with female specific challenges.

Regular training over long periods of time resulted in positive improvements in strength, however this was countered by the increased difficulty to then meet the weight limit for competitive bouts. Most boxers noted the challenge of reducing weight during their menstrual cycle, since their weight would generally fluctuate between two to three kilograms, with Hannah and Sarah quoting: ‘When I’m on [menstrual cycle] my weight fluctuates a few kilos and I’m not able to drink much’, ‘Being on your period really effects your weight’. Reducing bodyweight during a menstrual cycle was a monthly struggle for most boxers and more generally, a challenge very specific to female athletes who compete in weight regulated sports. The boxers suggested various strategies to monitor their weight. Interestingly, all athletes were aware of inappropriate and harmful techniques they employed during their earlier years and acknowledged that such techniques were not effective in the long term: ‘I’m not stupid with my diet anymore!’ (Amy), ‘I eat something healthy and take protein supplements after training now which help with recovery instead of leaving the gym starving’ (Lauren). With the help of their coach, nutritionist or a personal trainer, the athletes structured their training to bespoke boxing specific workouts to optimise their performance and help maintain weight during their menstrual cycle, with Zoe and Hayley explaining: ‘Me and my coach created a periodisation for training’, ‘I met with the nutritionist at GB boxing’. However, even at the elite level not all boxers had access to expert support and were therefore unable to gain sufficient advice.

The boxers discussed their continuous commitment to boxing and frequently travelling away on weekends to competitions and training camps. Lauren discussed the difficulty of maintaining a heterosexual relationship: ‘There is a challenge in your relationship, he [partner] didn’t know what he was letting himself in for, I was coaching and training three times a week. The roles were reversed, I was rarely at home’. Similarly, Amy elaborated on the lack of support from her family: ‘I resorted in hiding all my boxing achievements as my family had never approved of my participation in boxing. I’ve got a traditional
family that think women shouldn’t be in the ring’. The lack of support depicts the social struggle female boxers experience whilst pursuing their athletic careers. Traditional gender ideologies place females in nurturing roles whereas men hold the more masculine positions such as being assertive and powerful [Channon and Phipps 2017]. Deviating from these social norms may consequently lead to social disapproval from society, family members or even a romantic partner. Nonetheless, the boxers expressed their sense of pride in their accomplishments and attitude towards a socially unacceptable sport. Some boxers emphasised the importance of reframing to a positive mind-set as a valuable strategy, with Hannah and Sarah quoting: ‘I have to keep moving up and keep learning, no matter what anyone says’, ‘I believe it’s the CAN DO attitude, you have to think about the future’.

Dissatisfaction at the elite level.

Dissatisfaction at the elite level was noted as a current and continuing challenge in the later years of the boxer’s career. Dissatisfaction refers to how the boxers felt once they had excelled in their career; consequently, reaching the peak was not what they had expected in terms of training and competing as an elite female boxer. A number of boxers discussed the lack of some coaches’ readiness to train female boxers during the first ever GB female training camp, with Hannah and Gemma explaining: ‘There was a lack of understanding about female competition’, ‘You felt alone with some of the guidance they [coaches] were teaching, it didn’t translate into women’s boxing’. Feeling dissatisfied stemmed from the coach’s attitude and reluctance towards female boxers, with Gemma stating: ‘When we went away one of the coaches openly said he hates women’s boxing, he doesn’t think it’s right and we thought brilliant you’re responsible for us for the next week’. Moreover, the females explained that being set unrealistic goals, such as achieving the same benchmarks as the male boxers, and training monotonously every week discouraged them from training, as there was no sense of physiological progression or technical development: ‘Coaches couldn’t understand why the women couldn’t run as fast as the men, they thought we were lazy or unfit because we couldn’t keep up with the lads’ (Georgie).

Some boxers expressed feeling frustrated in the sport since the female team were not assigned a well-established programme in comparison to their male counterparts: ‘It took a very long time to integrate us [female boxers] into the GB program’ (Hannah). Furthermore, the boxers referred to organisational issues, such as the limited weight categories, which restricted them from achieving future goals such as competing at the Olympics: ‘There are less Olympic weight categories, less opportunities for us [female boxers]’ (Amy). Although boxers expressed the gradual improvements of coaching techniques and training camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boxing phase (years)</th>
<th>Challenge dimensions</th>
<th>Strategy themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early/Novice</td>
<td>Difficulties of competing as a female boxer</td>
<td>Challenge negative comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of support from the governing body</td>
<td>Gain help from the media to raise attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle/Developmental</td>
<td>Lack of support and opportunity for female boxers</td>
<td>Rephrase negative statements to positive actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing an unhealthy relationship with food</td>
<td>Gain support from your coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gain support from your team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later/Elite years</td>
<td>Dealing with female specific challenges</td>
<td>Train on your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seek others to train with</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on your potential</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-educate about nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take control of your training</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction at the elite level</td>
<td>Reframe to a positive mind-set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Access expert support</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Structure training</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cancelling out negative thoughts</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use club for support</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 2:
Experienced Challenges and their Associated Strategies in the Early, Middle and Later Years
since the first ever female team, the necessity for expert help for female boxers remains a contemporary challenge. Hayley discussed her journey of being excluded from the England team due to an injury and signified the lack of expert support for the England female boxers to enable her to return to boxing efficiently: ‘It’s difficult not having adequate support, we [female boxers] need access to expertise help, luckily I had my club to turn to for support’.

The boxers discussed cancelling out negative thoughts and using every opportunity to better themselves as boxers. For instance, the boxers acknowledged the vast progress in female boxing and appreciated the opportunity to represent England and GB internationally: Gaining more experience was so important despite the limited opportunities we [female boxers] had’ (Sarah). The boxers emphasised the importance of enjoying the experience and the learning curve of boxing at the elite level, as female boxing is growing in opportunity and equality. With this in mind, the boxers were grateful for the experience, support, opportunities and accomplishments in their boxing career and highlighted the personal achievement of becoming mentally stronger and resilient during the course of their boxing lifecycle.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings revealed that participants experienced unique challenges as female amateur boxers across their career stages. Although the boxers outlined specific issues relevant to the early, middle and later years, some commonalities were also apparent throughout. Firstly, a lack of support from others was a shared theme. As boxing has historically been considered a male-associated sport, perceptions that it does not align with a ‘suitable’ feminine identity were clearly apparent. In this study, it was revealed that these perceptions resulted in a struggle to be accepted and a lack of social support from others, most notably families, partners, friends and the media. Resentment for boxing within families derived from a disapproval of women competing in a sport known to be socially inappropriate for women [Channon and Jennings 2014], associated with certain forms of masculinity (e.g., strong, muscular, aggressive) and a sport which places females’ femininity and gender under question [McGannon et al. 2018: 169]. To expand, some boxers discussed the dislike of boxing within their families where being a female boxer intersected with the boxer’s femininity and physicality, a concept also highlighted within McGannon et al.’s [2018] study.

Furthermore, a dislike of boxing within a romantic heterosexual relationship portrays a juxtaposition of gender roles, whereby the male may feel de-masculinised and devalued as the alpha male within the relationship due to the female’s attachment to boxing [Channon and Phipps 2017]. However, the boxers discussed the strategy of reframing to a positive mind-set, a common strategy utilised more by female athletes, especially when the stressor appears to be beyond the athlete’s control [Dias, Cruz and Fonseca 2010]. For some women, a lack of support also resulted in them rescheduling their training around social events to demonstrate commitment to their family and relationships in light of a reversal of traditional gender roles. Therefore, female boxers may find it difficult to negotiate and balance their different (and sometimes conflicting) identities and priorities.

Due to their participation and success in a traditionally ‘masculine’ sport, stereotypes surrounding female boxers’ sexualities were also apparent. In line with Paul’s [2015: 415] findings with female MMA athletes, the boxers in this study expressed their frustration at presumptions from friends, colleagues and boxing fans, amongst others. This was also evident in previous research [Halbert 1997] where boxers described the stereotypical assumptions of the general public and people within the boxing industry, assuming that female boxers are either manly or butch, lesbian, ugly, overweight or just different and strange. However, the present study’s boxers along with Paul’s [2015] MMA athletes and Halbert’s [1997] boxers, adopted comparable strategies, such as being committed to training, not quitting and rephrasing negative statements to positive actions.

The findings from this study also revealed the boxer’s awareness of the lack of media promotion, which created a sense of isolation, with female boxing considered socially unacceptable. In contrast, elite male boxers were promoted via various means of media such as boxing magazines and live coverage of competitions. The boxers explained that due to a lack of promotion and opportunity, the progression of female boxing was slow and not taken seriously in comparison to their male counterparts. The seriousness of female boxers has previously been identified as a common challenge [McGannon et al. 2018; Tjønndal 2019a] whereby boxers’ femininity and even dress code may influence the public’s perception about female boxing. Halbert’s [1997] boxers also revealed that a lack of promotion and support by fans, promoters and managers was detrimental to their careers as women’s boxing was not deemed important. Moreover, Marshall [2016] stated that sports media consistently ignores female athletes’ accomplishments and treats them as second class citizens; thus, the lack of coverage on female sports has resulted in a sexist discourse in sports media. In agreement with Marshall [2016], Jakubowska, Channon and Matthews [2016: 417] found media coverage of a successful female MMA athlete was at times sexist, and dismissed her achievements because of her gender and the aggressive nature of MMA.
In light of the above problems, the athletes explained the importance of social support, in particular from their coaches. In agreement with previous research in sport and exercise psychology [Rees and Hardy, 2000], this study reflects the significance of receiving social support as a way of overcoming particular challenges. Receiving emotional (turning to others for comfort and security), esteem (giving an individual positive feedback), informational (providing an individual with guidance), and tangible (instrumental assistance, in which a person in a stressful situation is given the necessary resources) [Cutrona and Russell 1990] support from coaches and the national governing body (alongside teammates and family) was crucial in enabling the boxers to continue with their boxing career.

Although some boxers praised their boxing families for the support provided to them, others were more critical, outlining a lack of support from coaches and the national governing body throughout their career stages. For some of this study’s participants, issues with the national governing body resulted in difficulties receiving a boxing license, little regulation of female boxing, and few examples of the sport being prioritised in contrast to male boxing. As an example, one problem discussed was a lack of officials to referee female bouts during a national competition, resulting in uneven bouts and a disparity in competition experience in comparison to their foreign opponents.

Regarding coaching practices more specifically, a reluctance to train females, alongside a lack of understanding of female amateur boxing, resulted in some negative experiences for the participants. Some boxers outlined their experiences with sexist comments and stereotypical assumptions made by certain coaches, which led to feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction, similar to Halbert’s [1997] study where female boxers also depicted their experience of sex-based discrimination. Accepting female boxers as part of the GB team proved difficult and almost revolutionary for certain coaches; such intransigency demonstrates how key facilitators can express resistance to social inclusion of female athletes in elite sport. At the elite level, a lack of consistent access to expert support (for example when injured) was also outlined, suggesting female boxers and their needs may not be prioritised; therefore, a more well-established female boxing programme may be required.

Furthermore, some boxers described the difficulties of being the only female boxer at their respective gyms. For example, sparring and competitions for the female boxers was a rare opportunity as very little support was provided to organise such events. Despite this, some participants outlined positive experiences of having male sparring partners, as they were able to gain further respect and prove themselves, allowing others to see their potential. This aligns with Halbert’s [1997] study, where female boxers recognised the valuable emotional and physical (training with male boxers/coaches) support that some men provided, in essence helping their boxing development. Likewise, the female MMA athletes in Paul’s [2015] study indicated that training with their male teammates proved their dedication and seriousness.

Finally, throughout some of their career stages, the development of an unhealthy relationship with food, and adopting extreme weight loss strategies due to the limited weight categories were common challenges. The boxers discussed the consequences of drastic weight loss (i.e., feeling low, lack of energy) and for some, the onset of disordered eating and osteoporosis. Boxers who adhered to rapid weight loss strategies were in extreme danger of developing traits of the female athlete triad, where female athletes experience an interrelationship of menstrual dysfunction, disordered eating and osteoporosis [Nazem and Ackerman 2012]. Experiencing menstrual cycle dysfunction and disordered eating are very common in females who compete in endurance or weight classified sports [Pasque 2009].

Reducing weight during the menstrual cycle also proved to be an issue. Although the female boxers struggled with this, they advised seeking expert help (e.g. nutritionist, personal trainer) as a useful strategy, since reducing weight via rapid weight loss strategies became detrimental in the long term. In support of this, Ko et al. [2017: 249] noted that female reproductive physiology and irregularity is affected by several conditions such as extreme weight loss and excessive exercising, however the lack of available expert help (e.g., psychologist, nutritionist) was extremely limited. While some boxers relied on the support of their clubs, others expressed their frustration about the difficulty and expenditure of accessing expert help. As noted by Dijkstra, Pollock, Chakraverty and Ardern [2016: 419], healthcare professionals are the most appropriate people to evaluate the health status of athletes and provide objective advice on management and clinical outcomes. Moreover, in elite sports, decision making about health-related matters is usually informed by health care professionals working with the athletes.

The boxers explained that due to the limited weight categories many of them did not naturally qualify for the three Olympic weight categories that are in place for female boxers, resulting in further issues regarding reductions in weight. This is an issue that rarely effects male amateur boxers’ careers or more importantly their health. Crighton, Close and Morton [2016] suggested that introducing more weight classes in combat sports may reduce the prevalence of rapid weight loss strategies; however, the addition of female weight categories in amateur boxing is still a controversial topic within the International Boxing Association (AIBA) as this will result in the deduction of male weight categories.

Elite Female Boxers’ Perceptions of Their Boxing Journey
Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam, Catherine Phipps, Richard Thelwell and Neil Weston
For every addition of a female weight category, a male weight category will need to be relegated to allow for more places available for female boxers. The only identifiable strategy to help the female boxers reduce weight was through self-education via online resources. However, Reale, Slater and Burke [2017] assert that a combination of regular exercise and maintaining a low carbohydrate diet prior to a competition will allow combat sports athletes to reduce weight optimally. Consequently, it is crucial to inform boxers about the correct methods of weight reduction from the onset of their boxing career to reduce risk of health-related issues.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to explore the gendered challenges experienced by female amateurboxers. These were analysed separately in relation to the early, middle and later years and then discussed around a series of conceptual categories that run across the career stages of the women boxers. Furthermore, the analysis detailed the strategies that boxers employed for each specific challenge, with a view to providing a knowledge base that could inform current and future female boxers and their support staff. Whilst providing a rich body of information through a detailed qualitative enquiry, the findings are limited by examining a single albeit important perspective (i.e., the boxer). Due to limited volunteers (boxers being away competing, attending training camps) and the novelty of elite female boxing, the researchers were only able to recruit eight participants. Drawing upon best practice [Keegan, Harwood, Spray and Lavallee 2009], further research examining multiple perspectives of those close to the female boxer (i.e., coach, parent, sport science support staff etc.) would help to triangulate the knowledge derived from this study and provide a valuable insight into how best to support these athletes. Furthermore, examining the experience of female boxers who are currently in the early, middle or later years would help to overcome the potential retrospective recall issues of the present design and add to the findings of this study. Indeed, innovative voice recording methods [Jamison et al. 2001] or daily diaries as utilised by Nicholls, Holt, Polman and James [2005], would provide a valuable, instantaneous insight into the lived experiences of female boxers. Future research should also attempt to build on this qualitative study and identify areas of good practice where females new to boxing have been well integrated into the sport. Indeed, a broader examination as to successful methods to integrate females into sports [Burke 2015] in general would provide a wealth of knowledge to help increase sport participation, and widen the pool of talent to progress through the performance levels.

Despite the limitations, the present research provides the first study to uncover the specific challenges experienced by female boxers through the lifetime of their boxing career in addition to identifying how boxers sought to deal with those challenges. In doing so, this study generated unique female specific challenges and common strategies, which could be utilised to best support the female boxers throughout their boxing careers. Clearly it is important that boxing is inclusive to all and based on these findings it is argued a number of steps can be taken to improve gender equality. Consequently, the recommendations for policy and practice are provided below:

• Firstly, media promotion of women’s boxing is warranted by England Boxing to demonstrate gender equality and normalise women’s boxing within the wider society.

• Continuing professional development (CPD) workshops are also required for coaches, particularly in regard to weight management techniques specific to female boxers, the influence of training on the menstrual cycle, and physiological differences between male and female boxers. Moreover, coaches should be made aware of inappropriate and derogatory language used within boxing gyms and how to eradicate this.

• England Boxing should prioritise women’s boxing in ensuring that it is given an equal footing in comparison to men’s boxing. For instance, women should have the same access to expert support (e.g. when injured) as their male counterparts and ensure officials are present and supportive of women’s boxing events. Expert support would also benefit boxers’ wellbeing, mental health and ultimately their performance [Moghadam 2017].

• On a broader level, the AIBA should consider more weight categories for women’s boxing, following sports like Taekwondo and Judo, which provide an equal number of weight categories for their respective male and female athletes. These steps would arguably help continue to progress women’s boxing with a clear strategic lead, alongside developing a well-established women’s boxing programme at the elite level.
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Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam, Catherine Phipps, Richard Thelwell and Neil Weston

Elite Female Boxers’ Perceptions of Their Boxing Journey

Shakiba Oftadeh-Moghadam, Catherine Phipps, Richard Thelwell and Neil Weston
European fight books form a large corpus of printed and manuscript material from the fourteenth century onwards, and they provide a detailed view of martial arts practices. Equivalent primary sources in Asia are less numerous for the early modern period. Both scholars and martial arts practitioners have shown interest in the rediscovery of European martial arts in the globalized world of the twenty-first century. The recent developments about and around European martial arts studies sweep away the notion of Asia as the exclusive cradle of globalized martial culture, as was already challenged by a growing number of scholarly investigations about their myths and origins. This article reviews the interest in European Martial Arts in Asia. It focuses on the fight book of Paulus Hector Mair (1552–56) and on an Asian counterpart, the military treatise of Qi Jiguang. The German fight book proved to be of interest to a Japanese scholar and groups of martial arts practitioners. As such, it echoes recent interest in comparative studies about fight books stemming from Asia, Europe and the Americas, but also points out potential bias.
Within the field of martial arts studies, concepts such as ‘tradition’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘history’ have been revised and discussed [Bowman 2016a, 2016b, forthcoming], notably regarding collective memory and the connection between modern day martial arts practice and ‘a past’ [An and Hong 2019]. Building on these insights, the present case study reviews how Asian scholars and martial arts practitioners are receiving, or are dealing with, research about historical European martial arts. It focuses on the writings of Paulus Hector Mair of mid-sixteenth century Germany and the modern reading and practice of his works, and the work of a contemporary counterpart in China, namely the treatise of Qi Jiguang. This discussion highlights the value of comparative studies of historical European and Asian martial arts writings, both in their conception and reception, while also addressing the limits of such an endeavour.

According to the current state of research, the primary source material to work with is unbalanced. In sixteenth century Europe, close to one hundred primary sources are known, with a corpus rooted in the fourteenth century [Jaquet forthcoming]. In Asia, specifically China, only half a dozen books about Chinese martial arts are known [Wetzler 2016: 57]. Earlier texts are referred to in other sources as far back as the first century, but none of the original material has survived [Lorge 2018: 14]. The first Asian fight book matching the definition of European fight books were produced in the sixteenth century, in a different context.

**SHOOTING, FENCING AND TOURNAMENTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL EUROPE**

A large corpus of sources known as ‘fight books’ document the martial arts practices of late medieval and early modern Europe from the fourteenth century onwards [Jaquet, Verelst and Dawson 2016]. This specific literature focuses on the recording of personal fighting techniques through words and often images. It deals with various disciplines usually demarcated as: unarmed, civil (without armour), and armoured fighting techniques on foot or on horseback. Unfortunately, text is an imperfect medium for the transmission of an embodied practice such as fighting.

The fighting techniques dealt with are mostly associated with ritualized forms of combat within the realm of leisure (public competition, public display of skills) or more serious matters (duels of honour, judicial combat, self-defence), but not directly with military contexts [Jaquet 2018]. Other sources address those matters, such as military treatises, or specialized publications such as tournament books or archery treatises.¹ None of the latter actually address personal fighting techniques (martial arts practice) as the fight books do.

Late medieval and early modern forms of combat are also documented in non-technical sources produced around public displays of martial skills [McClelland 2007]. Far from the battlefields, shooting competitions, tournaments on horseback and fencing competitions on foot were part of both courtly and urban life. Within the urban context, these events were organized by associations of citizens and supported by town authorities, not the aristocracy or military elites [Tlusty 2016a; Tlusty 2016b]. As an example, Paulus Hector Mair provides us with several types of administrative documents regarding the organization and the conduct of events like shooting competition, tournaments and ‘fencing schools’ (i.e., competition) in mid-sixteenth century Augsburg. These are augmented with additional narratives in chronicles [Roth 1917: iv-xlvi] and technical information about martial arts in his fight book.

**COLLECTING MARTIAL ARTS KNOWLEDGE ON PAPER: PAULUS HECTOR MAIR AND QI JIGUANG**

Paulus Hector Mair (1517–1579) came from a privileged middle-class family of Augsburg, a centre for the production of weapons and military technology for the Holy Roman Empire. He began his civic career in 1537 and later served as an accounting official for the city, taking care of the martial events for the town. The historian Kazuhiko Kusudo [2010] presents him as a sport chronicler, because of his numerous annotations of accounting books regarding athletes and martial artists. Paulus Hector Mair was also a martial arts practitioner, and a collector of weapons, goods and books [Mauer 2000: 107–32]. As he writes in, *Opus amplissimum de arte athleticam*, 1552–6, ‘I have applied myself to the knightly practice of the sword, and learned combat in various weapons, and been appropriately tested in several prizefights, acquiring such a love for it that I undertook to compose this knightly book of honor’ [trans. Forgeng 2017: 276].

¹ For reference, regarding military books, see Leng [2002]. The so-called ‘drill-manual’, dedicated to the training of soldiers, only appeared later on, during the Thirty Years War. For reference see Lawrence [2009]. For references regarding tournament books, see Krause [2017]. Finally, little technical literature on archery is to be found in Europe. For references see Gunn [2010].
At the end of the preface of his voluminous anthology of martial arts, the author states that he invested a great deal of money in his project. He purchased old manuscripts and selected every technique himself out of them. He hired two skilled fencers to perform them one by one. In this process of experimenting and interpreting old fighting techniques, he also let the artists take notes for the drafting of the illustrations. These images are attributed to the workshop of Jörg Breu the Younger [Hils 1985: 199–200].

His works currently survive in three manuscripts, the production of which Forgeng [2017: 274] dates between 1552 and 1556. The most elaborated version (Vienna, ONB, 10825-6) consists of a two volume anthology of five hundred pages of large format (402x276mm) and richly illustrated (454 figures painted with aquarelle

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2 At least eight, listed in Forgeng [2017: 268-9].

3 Vienna, ONB, Cod. 10825, fol. 14v: Daraus ich allain die allerbesten und der kunst gemessisten nützlichsten, gezogen, und dieselben durch zwen tapffere weidliche fechter, so mit mir lust und liebe zu der ritterlich kunst gehabt, unnd darauff nicht mit geringer belonung erhalten, vorbemelte stick in allen wheren, wie sie inn dem Buch begriffen, maisterlich aus unnd ein gefochten (From these I have chosen only the best, the most suitable to the art, and the most useful, and had them masterfully executed by two valiant combatants, who like me loved the knightly art). Transcription Dieter Bachmann and translation Forgeng [2017: 276].
and tempera, decorated with gold and silver). It covers seventeen different martial disciplines from wrestling to armoured combat on horseback, but mostly deals with unarmoured combat on foot with a large variety of weapons, in the context of ritualized combat for leisure. More specifically, he focuses on the activities of fencing schools (competitions) and tournaments, even though the work also contains sections about judicial combat.

In explaining his motives, Mair tells his readers that he felt the urge to record these fighting techniques because the art of combat was neglected and mocked in his time. His costly project was financed by more than his own coins. The city tried and hanged him for embezzlement in 1579 [Mauer 2000].

Similar urges, but in another context, resulted in the edition of the *New Book on Effective Military Techniques* (*Jixiao xinshu*, 纂效新书) in 1561, authored by a Chinese general of the Ming Dynasty. Qi Jiguang (1528–1588) came from a military family and enjoyed a brilliant military career during the Ming Empire’s declining years. After having fought the Mongol invaders in the North, he moved to South East China to combat the coastal raids by wokou pirates. Assigned to the defence of Zhejiang in 1555, Qi Jiguang applied new theories of military organization, tactics, and equipment [Huang 1981: 159; Ma 2000; Guohua 2008; Ng 2014]. His experience and success in this theatre of war formed the basis of his book, which he published in 1561 (first edition printed by the author). A second edition came out in 1584, which reduced the initial eighteen chapters to fourteen.6

Unlike Paulus Hector Mair, Qi Jiguang’s life was dedicated to military service, and his motivation to record martial arts techniques flowed from this more practical perspective. He argued that a soldier in the middle of the battle would use only twenty percent of his skills. A better-prepared soldier, being able to use half of what he learned in training (reinforced by the practice of martial arts through drilled exercises), would be invincible [Huang 1981: 172–3]. Thus, alongside chapters on equipment, military tactics at sea and on the ground, we find content comparable to European fight books, where personal techniques (with or without weapons) are addressed. For instance, thirty-two hand-to-hand combat techniques (or stances) are briefly described and illustrated in the chapter *Quanjing Jieyao Pian* (拳经捷要篇) (Chapter on the Fist Canon and the Essentials of Nimbleness).7

Because of two completely different contexts of production, intended readership and use, both these works cannot really be compared with one another. The main intent of their authors, however, is similar: collecting martial arts knowledge on paper. Only the last section of the treatise of Qi Jiguang matches what the European fight books aim to achieve (inscribing, describing or codifying embodied knowledge related to martial arts).

**EUROPEAN MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES AND PRACTICE IN ASIA**

Kazuhiko Kusudo began publishing on the sport history of late medieval and early modern Europe in 1984, including six articles in German or English [Kusudo 1984, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2004 and 2010], and showed specific interests in Paulus Hector Mair’s manuscripts. Although a few references to the rest of the corpus of European fight books appear along the lines, Kusudo did not publish research about other fight books. The description of his actual research project (*Examination of people and society through sports history*, Hiroshima University) states:

The author is the only researcher on the history of German sports in the Middle Ages. Since conventional studies on sports history have not examined sports in the Middle Ages in detail, the author’s research has shed light, for the first time, on the fact that sports in the Middle Ages have a rich history.8

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1. Two manuscripts out of three are described in Leng (2010: item n° 8.3 and 8.4). The Munich version (BSB, cod. icon. 393) is sadly not included in the catalogue but is described by Hils (1985: item n° 54).
2. Vienna, ONB, Cod. 10825, fol. 6r: *Die weil ich aber merck, sihe und briefe, das disse manliche kunst des fechten, wie ander künstern mer, so dem geliebten vatterland, als für nutzliche und eerliche, den menschen durch die gelerten geprisen, und zu lumen furgestalt sein, von dengienigen, so aus faulkheit und hinlessigkeit, der gutten tugenden, kunsten nicht achten, auch dieselben zu lumen kain liebe noch naigung, nicht allain nit tragen, sondern dieselben vinter aus unwissender frechen, faulen leichtenvergikt, mit verachtlichen schmachworten, besudeln, und belegen* (But as I become aware and notice, that this manly art of fencing, as other arts besides, which profit the beloved fatherland as useful and honorable, and by the learned are praised for men to study, are by those who out of idleness and neglect fail to respect the good virtues and arts, and those that do neither love nor feel inclination to learn, not just failing to support, but the same that from an ignorant, impertinent and lazy carelessnesse use disdainful words of mockery to besmirch them). Transcription and translation Dieter Bachmann.
3. The work is edited in 1922: *Shanghai wu yin chu guan fa ring* (Chu guan fa ring,发行 in *Shanghai*: Han Fenlou). It is also available as a reprint by Taiwan Commercial Press (Taipeh) in 1978, and more recently edited by Zhongyi et al. (2001).
4. For a discussion about the martial content of the book, see for instance the extensive discussion of Ma (2000), “Inquiry into and Discussion of Qi Jiguang’s “Boxing Classic” For a selection of opposing views and different approaches to this source, see Henning (1995: 1–3); Lorge (2012: 167–9, 175–9, 205–10); Kennedy and Guo (2008: 176–81); and Phillips (2019: 46–63).
5. For a discussion about the martial content of the book, see for instance the extensive discussion of Ma (2000), “Inquiry into and Discussion of Qi Jiguang’s “Boxing Classic” For a selection of opposing views and different approaches to this source, see Henning (1995: 1–3); Lorge (2012: 167–9, 175–9, 205–10); Kennedy and Guo (2008: 176–81); and Phillips (2019: 46–63).
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Kazuhiko Kusudo is a pioneer of European martial arts studies in Asia, and he remains one of the very few Asian scholars publishing in the field today. The situation is reversed in Europe and in the United States, where a substantial number of scholars are researching and publishing on Asian martial arts studies.\(^9\)

The same fact can be observed within the communities of martial arts practitioners. While Asian martial arts are broadly practiced and re-invented in the West, the opposite is true in Asia. The number of Asian groups practicing Historical European Martial Arts is growing but still represents a niche (Jaquet, Tuaillon Demésy & Tzouriadis 2020).\(^{10}\) It has increased notably in the last years.

Focusing on their own martial heritage, Chinese scholars have produced new research on Chinese martial arts (Henning 2006), but European fight books have not yet permeated their interest.

**Conclusion**

**Towards a Cultural History of Martial Arts Through the Study of Fight Books**

Academic studies of European martial arts form only a small section of the emerging field of martial arts studies. If milestones are currently being reached in Europe and America,\(^1\) it is still a curiosity in Asia, both on the scholarly level and for martial arts practitioner communities. It feels like a kind of twenty first century ‘Europeanism’ (as opposed to the Orientalism that characterises some of the interests in Chinese martial arts in Europe and the States).

As outlined in this article, the value of studies of fight books, and of the history of martial arts practice in general, is of particular interest for cultural studies and sport history. Analysing first-hand documentation of martial arts techniques allows relevant insights concerning the cultural shift of martial arts practices between the military context and other ritualized forms of combat in a ‘civilian context’. More importantly, it allows us to understand the production of martial knowledge on paper in different societies as well as to circumvent and analyse different discourses about martial arts in its sociocultural context.

Furthermore, as proposed by Wetzler [2016],\(^{12}\) there is relevant material in these sources allowing for meaningful comparative studies. The cases at hand, Paulus Hector Mair and Qi Jiguang, present different ways of recording embodied martial arts knowledge on paper from the same period but within different cultural spaces, along with choice of media, development of technical lexis and technical illustrations. Also, the authorial project, including the intended audience and intended use, is a critical point of comparison to study the cycle of production, circulation and reception of these documents.

The reading of these sources, however, poses similar issues for both the scholar and the martial arts practitioner. Gaining access to the intended meaning within such texts and images is challenging. Depending on the type and purpose of the inquiry, such endeavours may be considered biased or impossible, or even not scientifically viable [Burkart 2016]. In order to try to reconstruct them persuasively, not unlike dance scholars studying antique dance treatises, historical martial arts scholars are arguably in need of collaboration with practitioners in order to glean insights into the possible practical dimensions of textually recorded fighting techniques. Certainly, without practical interests and experimentation, the study of such technical primary sources remains limited.

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Collecting martial art knowledge on paper in Early Modern Germany and China

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MANUFACTURING MARTIAL SPIRIT
ETHOS, IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY
IN THE CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS

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China, intellectual history, martial spirit, national ethos, political ideology

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the enduring place of ‘martial spirit’ (shangwu jingshen) in China. It argues that it emerged decisively as a discursive trope during the late nineteenth-century as China faced the existential threat of internal rebellion, Western and Japanese imperialism and a moribund Manchu dynasty. This was when China’s self-image as the ‘Central Kingdom’ gave way to the international image of the ‘Sick Man of Asia’, prompting many native and foreign observers to attribute China’s vulnerability to a chronic deficiency of martial spirit. The article shows that progressive intellectuals sought models of courage and self-sacrifice, looking both to China’s ancient history and to Sparta and Japan, while foreign historiographers, from Montesquieu, Hegel, Marx and Spencer to Lattimore and Wittfogel, proposed various theories to explain China’s weakness. Similarly, Confucian and Daoist, as well as Legalist and Moist philosophers of the late Bronze Age, all identified a role for martial spirit in character-building and the construction of national ethos, while military strategists from Sunzi to Qi Jiguang addressed such issues as esprit de corps and dedication to national salvation. Finally, the paper argues that even today, in the midst of unprecedented economic and military expansion, the competing demands of filial piety and patriotism continue to bedevil Chinese parents and policy makers.
INTRODUCTION

In 1920, Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), founder and first president of the Republic of China, presented the Jingwu Athletic Association with a calligraphic inscription, declaring: ‘Revere the martial spirit’, in recognition of the role traditional martial arts played in reviving the nation. After the founding of the People’s Republic, Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed: ‘As much as possible, we should promote [...] taijiquan and every form of physical exercise’. Premier Zhou Enlai added: ‘Studying and practicing taijiquan is a very good fitness activity.

It can strengthen our bodies, prepare us for self-defence, mould our moral character and is a wonderful pleasure. It brings infinite blessings and promotes longevity’. Vice President Liu Shaoqi, Admiral Chen Yi, and Admiral He Long have all expressed similar sentiments in praise of traditional martial arts. In 1978, future Chinese President Deng Xiaoping wrote a calligraphic inscription for a visiting Japanese delegation affirming: ‘Taijiquan is wonderful’. Behind this rhetorical enthusiasm for martial arts lurks a fear that China may once again lapse into the stereotype of the pusillanimous Chinaman, satirized by author Lu Xun, whose hapless hero Ah Q defends himself by saying, ‘A gentleman uses his tongue and not his fists’. All of this represents an attempt to splice a martial gene into the national DNA.

Where does the martial spirit live within a society characterized as ‘super stable’ [Jin 1998], where no Chinese mother wants her son to grow up to be a soldier, let alone a martial artist? This essay interrogates the paradox of China's image as the cradle of the martial arts and self-image as the graveyard of the martial spirit. Like the missing Pierre in Sartre's failed rendezvous in L'Être et le néant, absence, or ‘nothingness’, becomes a hyperawareness, or phenomenological 'presence' [Sartre 1943]. Thus, the martial spirit emerges as a problematic precisely because of its perceived absence, or in Liang Qichao's words, 'loss' (liushi) [Liang 1904].

DYNASTIC DIALECTICS AND HISTORY LESSONS

If we define the martial spirit as a willingness to use violence to resolve conflict, then contradictions may arise along fault lines of class, race, ethnicity, gender or generation; it may play out on battlefields or playing fields; it may be infused with nationalism or religious zeal; and it may be imperialist or separatist. However, the martial spirit can never be seen in a values vacuum: one man’s terrorist is another man’s hero. Yesterday’s rebel is today’s emperor.

What motivates a person to put their life on the line? Self-defence: surely; protection of loved ones, neighbors, co-ethnics: often; religion, ideology, principle, nation: sometimes? Historically, the Chinese have, like all monarchies, assumed that they would be ruled by someone not of their own choosing, and they do not assume that a benign foreign conqueror is inherently less desirable than a domestic despot. We have only to ask if all Taiwanese were initially delighted to be ‘liberated’ from Japanese colonial rule by the Kuomintang (KMT), or if all Hongkongers were thrilled with the 1997 handover to China. Today’s military recruits are made to swear allegiance to the Party, not the nation or constitution.

Reflecting on the lessons of history and the fate of nations, contemporary commentator Yao Tianhua concludes: ‘Martial spirit is the backbone of the nation and the perpetual motion machine of its strength and prosperity. [...] Nations that lose the martial spirit, and who are prosperous but not strong, will inevitably be defeated’ [Yao 2016]. Familiar Chinese aphorisms capture the negative stereotype of the warrior: ‘Men of quality do not become soldiers, and iron of quality is not used for nails’ and ‘Soldiers and bandits are cut from the same cloth’. On the policy level, this tilt is often traced to Song dynasty Emperor Taizu’s ‘emphasising the civil over the military’ (zhongwen qingwu). As China was forced to transition from empire to nation state in the twentieth century, the image of the soldier, too, required a makeover. This is reflected in the contemporary patriotic lyric, ‘Soldiers are all lusty lads, seeking glory and winning fame. For the sake of national security, we keep a tight grip on our rifles’. It is assumed that with the victory of a peasant revolution and the founding of a modern ‘republic’, the citizen has a stake in national defence not enjoyed by the serf or slave in the old feudal society.

There is much interest but little agreement among historians regarding the questions of an ancient aristocracy in China and the relative status of civil and military officers. Whether the political dominance of the aristocracy ended with the Han or the Tang dynasties is debatable, but there is general agreement that the Song elevated the status of the literati at the expense of the military. Song Emperor Taizu, fearing the power of his generals, convened a drinking party and convinced them, in the words of the aphorism, ‘to give up military power for a cup of wine’. Paradoxically, it was during the Song that China became the world leader in military technology, developing chromium-plated steel blades, crescent-bladed halberd, triple crossbows, repeating crossbows, whirlwind catapults, ‘cloud bridges’ (for scaling walled cities), ‘nest carts’ (for aerial reconnaissance), flame throwers, grenades, incendiary bombs, rockets, landmines, and ultimately handguns and cannon.

Nevertheless, in the end, these were no match for the mobility, decentralized command, near real-time communications and martial spirit of Genghis Khan and his Mongol horsemen. The Song was constantly harassed by the Khitan, Tungut, Tartar, Oirat, and Jurchen...
tribes, and finally obliterated by the Mongols, but only after losing the North to the Jin and relocating the whole court to the South. When Yue Fei (1103–1141), who fought against the Liao and Jin incursions, was asked when peace would return, he perhaps apocryphally replied, ‘When officials are not corrupt and generals are not afraid to die’.

The Song, who surrendered to the Mongols, and the Ming, who surrendered to the Manchus, are held up as lessons that elevating the scholars above the warriors is a disastrous policy. There is a saying in Chinese: ‘When a scholar meets a soldier, the scholar may be right, but he will never convince the soldier’. Nevertheless, the scholars were accorded higher status and compensation, and during the Ming, the generals had to suffer the double indignity of court eunuchs dispatched to the battlefield to tell them how to conduct their operations. This reflects the delicate balance between legitimacy and power, i.e., civil legitimacy and military power.

The Mongols attempted to crush the martial spirit of their Chinese subjects by crude policies, such as controlling the possession of kitchen knives, but their rule lasted a mere 70 years. Four and a half centuries later, the Manchus, engaged as mercenaries by the Ming court to put down the Yellow Turban Rebellion, exploited their military advantage, staying on to become the new rulers of China. There is no more vivid example of lacking martial spirit than employing duplicitous foreign mercenaries to fight one’s own domestic battles. Proclaiming the Qing dynasty in 1644, the Manchus employed a subtler policy of ‘using Han to control Han’ by promoting Neo-Confucian doctrines of loyalty and obedience to authority. Moreover, success on the battlefield and the toppling of dynasties is considered ipso facto proof of the passing of the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ to new hands, even foreign hands. While weakening the Chinese with their own doctrines, the Manchus themselves preserved their traditional martial customs, especially horsemanship and archery. The empire was expanded most dramatically under robust foreign dynasties, and today’s ‘China’ lies within the borders drawn by seventeenth-century Manchu conquerors.

Like the biblical exodus, the Long March, Mao’s 1934 Red Army retreat from Nationalist and warlord encirclement, has acquired mythic significance in modern Chinese history. Mao’s poem ‘The Long March’ says: ‘The Red Army fears not the hardships of a long march. Ten thousand rivers and a thousand mountains are mere trifles’ [Mao 1935]. Two of the essays collected in the influential Little Red Book [Mao 1966] are ‘Revolutionary Heroism’ and ‘Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win’, invoking the martial spirit at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. Comparing Mao and Moses, Mao’s righteous struggle is legitimized by the universal laws of dialectical materialism and class struggle, while Moses is a prophet, channeling the commands of the Hebrew deity Yaweh. With the Pharaoh’s chariots bearing down, and the Red Sea before them, it was Yahweh, ancient god of storm and war, who assured Moses, ‘The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace’. The warrior heroes of the Iliad and Odyssey, Achilles and Odysseus, epitomize the human condition: aware of their fate, unlike animals, but not immortal like the gods. They manifest the martial spirit in accepting their fate, dying bravely, and achieving lasting fame. Greek mothers exhorted their sons on the eve of battle: ‘With your shields or on them’ (return victorious or dead). Faith was the fuel of the martial spirit for the Hebrew prophets, while fate, fame, and fear of shame inspired the Greek warrior heroes. Mao becomes Moses, the liberator; if Moses speaks to Yaweh, Mao speaks to Marx, and the whole peasant class becomes the ‘chosen people’.

Contemporary Chinese historians believe that a fundamental difference between East and West is that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of ‘original sin’ sanctions the use of force to curb cupidity, whereas Confucian faith in ‘the goodness of our original natures’ (xing ben shan) favors the persuasive power of words. Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian scholar and statesman Wang Yangming, in a letter to disciple Xue Shangqian, said: ‘Defeating the bandits in the hills is not as difficult as defeating the bandits in the heart’ [Wang 1516]. Many Chinese historians today, however, feel that the reason Japan’s Meiji reform movement of 1868 succeeded, whereas China’s Reform Movement of 1898 failed, was that the former was led by samurai and the latter by scholars. Art historians often compare William Michael Harnett’s nineteenth-century painting ‘After the Hunt’, illustrating man’s conquest of nature, with eighteenth-century Wu Li’s landscapes, showing tiny human figures against a backdrop of towering mountains, highlighting the different cultural values of domination versus harmony. Others point to the influential Confucian ‘Doctrine of the Mean’ (zhongyong) to illustrate China’s fundamental accommodationist ethos and faith in the seductions of civilization to sinicize conquerors. ‘The highest good is like water’, ‘softness overcomes hardness’ and ‘greatness embraces the many’ are common epigrams plucked from classic works that express the value of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. Just as late Qing reformers blamed Neo-Confucianism for China’s inability to evolve and change, today’s advocates of reviving the martial spirit still blame Neo-Confucianism for ‘emphasizing the cultural (wen) at the expense of the martial (wu)’.

Chinese Communist Party founder Chen Duxiu, in an essay entitled ‘Resistance’ (Dikangli), states: ‘Daoism values quietism; Confucianism values decorum; and Buddhism values emptiness. Righteous knights-errant are considered outlaws, and upright men are considered ruffians’ [Chen 1915]. He calls attention to the modern environment, where he says the martial spirit is still relevant, but instead of physical prowess, it
requires social skills and discipline. Today, surveys of current recruits’ motivation for joining the army consistently find that no one checks the box for ‘loyalty to the ancestral homeland’, prompting calls for renewed emphasis on the martial spirit in the context of patriotism.

THE MARTIAL SPIRIT AND ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

The Warring States Period, as the name suggests, was an era of intense internecine conflict between the former feudalatories of the Zhou Dynasty. The ideal remained peace and unity, but the various schools of thought proposed solutions that ranged from restorationist to evolutionist, optimist to pessimist, and pacifist to imperialist. The martial spirit is by no means a recent preoccupation of modern Chinese nation builders, but has been a perennial trope in Chinese philosophy from earliest times.

In the Analects, ‘Shuer’ says: ‘What Confucius was very cautious about was fasting, war and disease’ [Yang 2018]. His emphasis was on character-building through the performance of rites and reading of the classics, and his heroes were righteous rulers rather than courageous warriors. However, he was realist enough to not neglect military preparedness, and said in Analects, ‘Weiling gong’: ‘Men of steadfastness and righteousness should not put life above righteousness, and should be prepared to die to preserve their righteousness’ [Yang 2018]. In the Kongzi jiyu, we find a vision of the Confucian utopia: ‘City walls are not built, moats are not dug, weapons are melted for plowshares, horses are put out to pasture, and there is a thousand years without the disaster of war’ [Wang 2009]. The Analects, ‘Yanyuan’ lists three essentials for the nation: adequate food, adequate weapons, and confidence of the people. It goes on to say that if you have to sacrifice one, it would be weapons, and if you can have only one, it would be the confidence of the people [Yang 2018].

This idea of confidence is echoed in Sunzi’s Art of War, when it says: ‘The dao is what unites the hearts of the population to their leaders’ [Wu, Guo 2006]. For Confucians, then, a model emperor with a righteous cause is the soul of military power. The emperor inspires morale in the troops, and in the words of the Book of Odes: ‘The king raised an army, forged armor and weapons, and marched together side-by-side with us’ [Han 2017]. For the Daoists, an invisible emperor, apolitical literati, and contented peasantry was the best recipe for peace. The cultured class was loathe to forfeit the comforts of home and court and needed to be reminded of their patriotic duty by Eastern Han historian Ban Zhao ‘to throw down the writing brush and join the army’. More cynical was Warring States poet Qu Yuan, who said: ‘The wind sighs and the Yi River is frigid; our soldiers march off but do not return’ [Qu 2014]. Thus, we cannot expect the Five Classics and Four Books, compiled under Confucian influence, to celebrate warrior heroes. The Legalists, by contrast, were ruthless realists and advocated a totalitarian, Spartan-like state, with a population of citizen soldiers.

Confucianism has often been considered synonymous with Chinese culture itself, but May Fourth Movement modernizers chanted: ‘Down with Confucius and Sons’, and Mao, in turn, mocked Confucius as Kong Laoer (Confucius the Cock). It was not until Hu Jintao’s 2005 proclamation of the ‘harmonious society’, signaling an end to class struggle, and the proliferation of more than 1000 Confucius Institutes around the world, that Confucius is now considered officially rehabilitated. The Confucians are often accused of weakening China by emphasizing the cultural/civil (wen) over the martial/military (wu), but Confucian apologists point to a more muscular Confucianism in ancient times, where archery and chariotereering were counted among the ‘Six Arts’ in the education of a gentleman, and Confucius is reputed to have said, ‘To fail to teach the people the military arts is tantamount to slaugthering them’. Moreover, apocryphal accounts of Confucius’ life record his extraordinary physical strength, his endorsement of avenging wrongs against family members, and the distinguished military careers of disciples like Zi Lu and Ran You.

Speaking of courage (yong), the Analects, ‘Xianwen’ records, ‘The man of ren (benevolence) will necessarily possess courage, but the courageous man does not necessarily possess ren’ [Yang 2018], and the Confucian classic Liji (Book of rites) states, ‘A true Confucian can be killed, but he cannot be humiliated’ [Chen 1987]. The second most important classic in the Confucian canon, the Mencius, says, ‘The gentlema would prefer not to fight, but if necessary, he should fight to win’. This grudging endorsement is also reflected in Mencius’ anecdote about the King of Qi, who confessed to the vice of admiring martial courage, and the Shiji’s account of King Wu, who prided himself on his physical prowess and died in a cauldron-lifting contest. Later, with the installation of Confucianism as the state ideology under the Han, the martial spirit declined, setting the stage for almost four centuries of division, known as the Six Dynasties.

The Daoists, like the ancient Greek Cynics, rejected social conventions and went on to constitute the quietist strain in Chinese culture. Their classic touchstone, the Daodejing, unequivocally condemns warfare, linking it to the twin sins of ‘grasping’ and ‘insatiability’: ‘When the dao prevails in the world, even war horses plow the fields; when the dao does not prevail, mares foal on the battlefields’ [Wen 2012]. Thus, the Zhuangzi devotes a whole chapter to an allegory about swordsmanship. As the story goes, the emperor, a connoisseur of swordsmanship, hosts 3,000 fencing masters, who delight their patron with a daily display of lethal dueling. Hearing of Zhuangzi’s skill, he is summoned to court, but...
before trying conclusions with the emperor’s best, he relates a parable of ‘three swords’. In this tale, each of the swords represents a different station in life and a different standard of conduct: the sword of the emperor, the sword of the feudal lords, and the sword of the common people. On hearing the moral that the emperor occupies the highest station but models the lowest standard, he is instantly enlightened and dismisses his entire stable of retainers [Fang 2017].

The Spring and Autumn to Warring States transition saw a shift from bronze to iron, chariots to infantry, and aristocracy to meritocracy, together with the rise of a new political philosophy called Legalism. The optimistic view of human perfectibility and virtue ethics in Confucius and Mencius began to give way to Shang Yang and Han Fei’s more cynical appraisal of human nature and an embrace of peasants and warriors as the real foundations of prosperity and security. Accepting self-interest as the underlying motivation in all endeavors, they observe that, although agriculture and warfare are bitter and dangerous, people will engage in them for the prospect of wealth and fame. The state should be ruled by impartial administrators, not sages, who institute a strict system of predictable rewards and punishments. ‘There is no place to flee from the army ranks’ says the Book of Lord Shang, and there are handsome rewards for decapitating the enemy. Disparaging merchants and intellectuals, the text says: ‘Those who do not work but eat, who do not fight but attain glory, who have no rank but are respected, who have no emolument but are rich, who have no office but lead […] these are called villains’ [Pines 2017].

The Confucians celebrated exceptional acts of filial piety, while the Legalists opened a path to fame and glory for the rank and file through the martial spirit. Only the Legalists explicitly advocated militarism and ultimately were embraced by the state of Qin, which under the First Emperor reunited the fractured empire. By famously burning the books and burying the Confucians, the First Emperor signaled his intentions to elevate the military and sideline the Confucian masters and Mencius began to give way to Shang Yang and Han Fei’s more optimistic view of human perfectibility and virtue ethics in Confucius and Mencius, who said: ‘They have no respect for fathers or rulers’ [Zhu 1983]. Similarly, Legalist Han Fei roundly condemned them as one of society’s ‘five vermin’, undermining respect for authority and no better than hired thugs. However, Han Fei shows equal contempt for the Confucian scholars and the knights-errant when he says: ‘The literati corrupt the proper order with words, and the knights-errant flout the law with martial arts’ [Xu 2003]. Like the Daoists, the knights-errant had distain for worldly success, but unlike them, were socially engaged. The Confucians and Legalists were both upholders of social harmony – one through moral suasion and the other law and order; and the knights-errant and Daoists were both individualistic – one advocating action and the other non-action (wuwei). Although
Daoism and Buddhism have been adopted as the house religions of the internal martial arts and Shaolin respectively, it is Legalism, Moism, and the knights-errant who have historically contributed most to promoting the martial spirit. Whether Confucian, Moist, Legalist, or Daoist, social harmony was the sacred goal of all schools of thought, but divergent attitudes toward the transgressive acts of the knights-errant provide a convenient litmus test for separating out their fundamental differences on the question of martial spirit.

Neither the scholar-official nor the peasant led lives conducive to the preservation of the martial spirit, and both Moism and Legalism eventually disappeared as living traditions. Prior to the Song dynasty, civil and military officials enjoyed equal status, but the Song saw a decisive tilt to the civil, and we no longer hear exhortations such as Han dynasty Ban Chao’s, ‘Throw down the writing brush and join the army’, as recorded in his History of the Later Han biography. However, China often seemed to have more confidence in her ability to ‘sinicize’, i.e., civilize, her rivals than to repel them. At the same time, these conquerors were often clever enough to use China’s own doctrine of the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ and the Confucian emphasis on deference to authority to neutralize resistance. External pressure, necessitating revival of the martial spirit and the empowerment of frontier military garrisons, often led to an imbalance between center and periphery, which set the stage for the overthrow of the court. The martial spirit requires a certain spiritual fervor, which the Manchu warrior possessed by virtue of lifestyle, the Taiping and Boxer rebels possessed by virtue of millenarian and magical beliefs, and the Republican and Communist revolutionaries possessed by virtue of ideology and national salvation.

While Marxist historians employ the dialectic of class struggle, traditional Chinese historians rely on the organic yin-yang paradigm to explain the rise and demise of dynasties and the vicissitudes of family fortunes, as ‘wealth cannot be maintained for three successive generations’ (cai buchuan sandai). In this latter framework, China is cast in the passive ‘yin’ role in an ineluctable struggle between agricultural and pastoral or seafaring civilizations. This theme was particularly prominent during China’s nineteenth-century encounter with the West, and reemerges today, even as China embarks on an ambitious expansionist policy of ‘one belt, one road’, creates island outposts in the Pacific, and is poised to become the world’s largest economy. China’s richest man Ma Yun (Jack Ma), a martial arts enthusiast who has produced a gongfu fantasy video starring himself, and has even branded his own martial arts style (gongshoudao), says: ‘A great people will certainly possess the martial spirit. […] However, those today who revere the martial spirit should strive to overcome themselves rather than seeking to overcome others’ [Ma 2017]. This enlightened attitude attempts to replace the social Darwinism of Lu Xin’s ‘man-eating’ (chiren) society, and Mao’s insistence on ‘armed struggle’ with a ‘harmonious society’ called for by former President Hu Jintao. This concern has even entered the realm of gender politics, and in a recent book by Sun Yunxiao entitled Zhengjiu nanhai (Save our boys), Wang Xiaodong claims that in contemporary society, men are getting weaker, while women are getting stronger [Sun 2010]. The gender binary as a metaphor, however, has a long history, going back to British formulations of ‘the manly Englishman’ and ‘the effeminate colonial’. The Western student of Asian martial arts may have ‘something to prove’ to the bullies on the block or the school yard, but he does not carry the burden of effeminating colonialism on his back. The stereotype of the ‘Sick Man of Asia’ reproduces itself.

THE MARTIAL SPIRIT AND MILITARY STRATEGY

Moving from martial ethos, the peace-loving or warlike disposition of a people, we now examine the theories of those actually tasked with defence of the nation. China is justly famous for its ancient works on military science, and in spite of great differences in technology, they are still found relevant today for their psychological insight and applicability beyond the battlefield. The earliest of the ‘seven classics on military strategy’, Sunzi’s Art of War, distinguishes the martial spirit of the leadership and that of the rank and file. The head of state and generals must check their temper and guard against impulsive decisions. The classic says, ‘Anger can turn to joy, and resentment can turn to happiness, but a defeated country is lost forever, and the dead can never return’. The foot soldiers, at the tip of the spear, are subject to a group psychology that reacts to immediate conditions: ‘If you corner the enemy, they will offer stiff resistance; if you allow an escape route, they will eventually wear themselves out; pursue them closely, but do not press them, and their qi will gradually be exhausted’ [Sun 2006]. The ‘qi’ that the classic speaks of is an amalgam of physical stamina and psychological will, and is as good as any definition of martial spirit.

Within the ‘seven military classics’ corpus, compiled during the Northern Song, the Art of War of Master Wu (Wuzi bingfa), generally dated to the Warring States Period, shows a balance of Confucian and Legalist philosophy, addressing both the need for virtue in the ruler to win the hearts and minds of the people and political indoctrination in the troops to make them willing to sacrifice for a righteous cause. The Three Strategies (Sanlüe) adds that prosperity is proof to the population of the wisdom of the ruler’s policies, and failing that, they will not make sacrifices merely to preserve their poverty. Moreover, they are far more willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if they know conscription will not interrupt their vital economic activities, that generals are willing...
to share the harsh conditions of long campaigns, and that the families of the fallen will be comforted and compensated. Beyond this, in order to take advantage of group psychology, the Art of War of Master Wu recommends that fighting units be composed of recruits from the same village, as they share a common language, bonds of mutual affection, and investment in face.

The Taigong’s Six Secret Teachings (Taigong liutao) is often cited for its Daoist influence, owing to its emphasis on ‘soft power’ and the subtlety of its understanding of psychological warfare. This begins with concealing one’s own strength in order to beguile the enemy into overconfidence, because, as the Daodejing says, ‘Excessive strength inevitably breaks’. The text outlines twelve techniques for undermining the enemy’s preparedness, including flattery, bribery, disinformation, duplicity and spying. Moreover, to win the devotion of one’s own troops, there should be a code of discipline that features harsh punishment for misconduct by high-ranking officers and handsome rewards for valor in the rank and file. Similarly, the Art of Sima (Simafa), using Confucian terms, advocates ren (benevolence) treatment of soldiers to inspire loyalty and willingness to sacrifice. By contrast, the Wei Liaozi recommends a Legalist, spare-the-rod policy of aversive discipline, including the death penalty for lack of fervor. The Fanjing warns, however, that both awards and punishments can have untoward consequences: awards may foster quarreling and punishments devolve into cruelty.

As Europe strode the globe like a colonial Colossus, the vast Ming empire cowered at the onslaught of a handful of Japanese pirates. It was at this juncture that General Qi Jiguang created his Quanjing (Classic of pugilism) form, as much to stoke the martial spirit as train skills that, after all, were not applicable to battlefield conditions. Qi Jiguang was China’s preeminent, pre-modern exponent of military science. In his fuxiao Xinxia and Lianbing shiji, he covered every aspect of the material and psychological requirements of an army. His recruitment policies strongly favored ‘honest country folk’ over ‘city wastrels’ (‘Recruiting’), and he warned that morale depended on a fair system of rewards and punishments, with no tolerance for rape, pillage, and mistreatment of prisoners of war (‘Jinling’). Qi was a master of group psychology and realized that the slightest hesitation or hint of a desire to retreat could infect a whole army with indecision and be toxic to their confidence: ‘If a single soldier turns his head, it sows doubt in the whole army; if a single soldier retreats an inch, it deflates the spirit of the whole army’ (‘Answering Questions’).

He was skeptical of the value of martial artists in the ranks, observing that fighting in close formations on the battlefield, ‘the courageous cannot charge to the front, and the cowardly cannot fall to the rear’ (‘Answering Questions’). However, Qi added, ‘Those with natural courage, and who have strength, stature, and agility, can benefit from martial arts training to reach an even higher level’ (‘Recruiting’). For those in command, leading by example was essential for maintaining troop morale, and even the general must be prepared to share the bitter lives of the troops and to participate in rigorous training [Qi 1560]. All of this is a footnote to the third-century BCE Lushi chunqiu’s epigramatic: ‘The undefeated army consists of many soldiers with one mind’.

**WESTERN THEORIES OF CHINA’S MARTIAL ETHOS**

Historiography as it developed in the West, whether materialist or idealist, teleological or non-teleological, analytical or speculative, often viewed China as an enigmatic exception. For Hegel, the dynastic cycle made it a static civilization, essentially without history, and for Mao, it required a revision of classical Marxism to allow the peasants rather than the proletariat to play the role of revolutionary vanguard. Materialist hermeneutics of cultural difference generally rely on some version of environmental determinism. This approach has a long history in the West, beginning with Plato, Aristotle, Strabo and Hippocrates, who attributed the relative sophistication of Greek culture to a temperate climate. A number of medieval Middle Eastern scholars linked water, soil and temperature to racial differences, a theme taken up by Western thinkers such as Montesquieu during the period of European expansion. Still later, in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Ratzel applied Darwin’s theory of evolution to explain differences in human physiology.

The road from determinism to racial essentialism is not unknown in China either, where early Zhou philosopher and statesman Guan Zhong focused on rivers as accounting for the different customs of the various feudal states. Thus chapter 39, ‘Rivers and Lands’ (Shuidi), of the Guanzi attributed to him says of the people of the state of Qi: ‘The rivers are wild and tortuous, and therefore the people are brutish and fearless’ [Guan n.d.]. Here we have a classic statement of a causal connection between environment and ethos.

Two modern historians who applied this notion of environmental determinism to China were Owen Lattimore and Karl Wittfogel. Lattimore emphasized the Cain and Abel contradiction between agriculturalists and pastoralists, with Chinese civilization growing up on the loess plains of the Yellow River basin, and nomadic herders occupying the northern steppes. Settled agriculturalists expand inch-by-inch, bringing more land under cultivation, while pastoralists periodically swoop down to raid their riches, or even to conquer and rule them.
Pastoralists grow up in the saddle, and the skills of herding and hunting are seamlessly adapted to cavalry warfare and nurturing of the martial spirit. Echoes of this clash of civilizations can be seen today in China’s identity politics and separatist movements among Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongols and Manchus. Han Chinese textbooks until recently gathered them all under the rubric of ‘barbarians’ (yemen minzu). The Great Wall is the ultimate monument to this defensive quality. Only a ‘despot’ central government, according to Wittfogel, could hold vast lands together.

Pursuing another line of environmental determinism, Karl Wittfogel proposed the theory of ‘hydraulic civilizations’ and ‘oriental despotism’. For Wittfogel, however, it was the necessity to contain and channel the Yellow River, whose seasonal flooding, like the Nile Valley, necessitated strong central authority to conscript able-bodied men to undertake great public works. Whether threats from rivers or raiders, large-scale conscription requires transcending local interests and gives the martial spirit a distinctly defensive quality. Only a ‘despot’ central government, according to Wittfogel, could hold vast lands together.

The notion of a ‘changeless’ China was challenged by John Fairbank, who offered a model of ‘change within tradition’, though this was criticized as Eurocentric and patent tautological. Levenson, Wright and Feuerwerker argued that Confucianism was fundamentally incompatible with modernity, while Naitor Torajiro countered that the decline of the aristocracy and the institution of the civil service examination system created a meritocracy, which marked an indigenous turn to modernity. However, others point out that the exams were based on mastery of classical texts, and physiocratic hostility to commerce and military service persisted. Of the four traditional social classes – gentry, farmers, artisans and merchants – traders were the lowest, and soldiers were excluded altogether, along with slaves, entertainers, eunuchs and clergy.

The interdependence of parents and children in life continues in the afterlife, when the welfare of ancestors depends upon continuing veneration by descendants, and the ancestors, in turn, sit in judgment on the living. As in ancient Greece, the Chinese dead were dependent on the memory and ritual offerings of the living. This picture is somewhat complicated by an overlay of belief in reincarnation, but regardless of the vision of an afterlife, they all feature a system of rewards and punishments for behavior in this life, which would have a significant impact on willingness to die for a higher purpose. The idea of martyrdom and sacrifice as a fast track to paradise has been prominent in Islam and Shinto, but religion can cut two ways: it can make people willing to sacrifice in this life in hopes of reward in the next, or convince them to turn the other cheek and accept circumstances as part of a divine plan, out of their hands.

In the Chinese case, the valorization of care for living parents and veneration of ancestors normally trumped the ambition to achieve family glory through arms. The Chinese have not regarded religion as something to die for: certainly there is no equivalent of martyrdom in the Coliseum or the Crusades, or wars between Catholics and Protestants, Sunni and Shia. Reflecting the tension between the demands of filial piety and broader social consciousness in today’s Hong Kong protestors, who, anticipating detention or even death, leave letters of apology to their parents before taking to the streets.

Manufacturing Martial Spirit
Douglas Wile
If the core of Chinese religion is ancestor worship, nevertheless, the typical altar is crowded with an eclectic assortment of gods, goddesses, bodhisattvas, sages and culture heroes, each petitioned for special blessings. China’s ‘god of war’ Guan Yu, the Three Kingdoms general, depicted in iconography in full armor with eponymous halberd in hand, is deified and venerated as a champion of justice and powerful ally in exorcizing demons. He did not, however, define the cultural ethos like the nearly thirty war gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, or the centrality of the martial spirit in Sikhism or the Kshatriya caste.

Together with ancestor worship and polytheism, the third pillar of Chinese folk religion is a belief in fate (ming), the commonsense notion that you did not choose the circumstances you were born into, particularly important in a society with limited social mobility, strict gender roles and arranged marriage. Fate is not entirely opaque, however, and the veil may be lifted by myriad techniques of divination, including astrology, numerology and necromancy. Acceptance of fate may have propelled the ancient Greek warriors onto the battlefield, but it was not a similar motivator in China. For the rationally inclined, the dao, operating through yin and yang, the Five Phases (wuxing), and Branches and Stems (ganzhi), seemed an adequate metaphysics to explain the natural world. Ren (benevolence), operating through the Three Bonds (sangang) and Five Relationships (wuwan), seemed adequate to order the social realm. If there was no theory of progress, there was also no damnation or salvation, and all the laws were immanent in creation, with no need for divine intervention. For deeper seekers, Daoism and Buddhism offered inner peace and outer harmony, and with a little more imagination, inner and outer alchemy promised embodied immortality.

THE ‘HUNDRED YEARS OF HUMILIATION’: VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

After two centuries of Manchu rule, mid-nineteenth-century China experienced a series of devastating upheavals: the Taiping Rebellion, lasting 14 years, ravaging 17 provinces, and costing 20 million lives; defeats in the First and Second Opium Wars against Britain and France, resulting in the humiliating Unequal Treaties; the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 which saw the loss of Korea and Taiwan and a staggering indemnity; as well as the failed Self-Strengthening Movement, the failed Reform Movement and Coup d’Etat of 1898, and the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Much of what we would consider sovereignty, as well as large swathes of territory, had been sacrificed, tens of millions of lives lost, and China’s political status was generously referred to as ‘semi-colonialism’. Landless, starving peasants cannot be induced to forfeit their lives by appeals to patriotism when they correctly conclude that things could hardly get worse under new masters, while the Manchus, for their part, did not feel they were defending their sacred homeland.

By the late nineteenth century, leading intellectuals faced the double dilemma of a moribund foreign dynasty and aggressive Western and Japanese imperialism. The enervating influence of opium certainly did little to ignite the spirit of self-confidence and resistance. Added to this was the humiliation of a modernizing Japan, that had already defeated both China and Russia on land and sea. The Jewish forces that chased the Roman legions out of Judea in the second century CE were not Talmudic scholars. Cultural renewal was now a matter of survival and not merely style. The reform agenda included politics, society, religion and a host of cultural values, one of which they called the ‘martial spirit’. This historical experience informs a discourse around martial spirit today and a fear that China is once again lapsing into the declining curve of the national defence cycle.

A generation of reformist intellectuals realized that the ‘Central Kingdom’ would need to re-imagine itself as one among many nation states, locked in a Darwinian struggle for survival of the fittest. Cantonese scholar Kang Youwei (1858-1927) emerged as senior ideologue for the reform movement and personal adviser to the young Manchu emperor Guangxu. Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the millenarian Taiping Rebellion, Kang proposed a constitutional monarchy with a kind of progressive Confucianism as its political and spiritual ideology. Recasting Confucius as a messianic prophet, whose core teaching was ‘benevolence’ (ren), he blended nationalism with a spiritualized Confucianism. Ultimately, this top-down approach was doomed by the youth and inexperience of the Guangxu Emperor, and the Hundred Days of Reform was aborted by the coup d’état that brought the Dowager Empress and conservative party back to power. It was not until the twentieth century, and only after a Nationalist Revolution, Communist Revolution, and Reform and Openness Policy that China would emerge in the twenty-first century as a world super-power, with nuclear bombs, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and the world’s largest standing army.

One of the most radical of the generation of intellectuals who faced the double dilemma of Manchu rule and Western imperialism was Tan Sitong (1865-1898). His first task was to remind his countrymen that rule by a foreign dynasty was not normal. After the Coup d’Etat of 1898 ended the Hundred Days of Reform and brought the Empress Dowager back to power, he plotted a counter coup with General Yuan Shikai and cultivated the support of the bodyguard brotherhoods led by Great Sword Wang the Fifth (Dadao Wang Wu). After Yuan betrayed the plotters, and Tan was arrested, Wang Wu and a cadre of martial
artists planned a daring but ill-fated rescue at the execution grounds. In the true knight-errant tradition, and believing that no revolution in history had succeeded without its martyrs, Tan allowed himself to be a sacrificial lamb, while other reformers fled to Japan and continued agitation. Truly, martyrdom and the martial spirit are inextricably bound. Tan sought to take the martial spirit of the xia, which operated on the local level, and apply it, as with Japan’s samurai, to the creation of a national martial ethos.

One of T’an’s co-conspirators, Liang Qichao (1873–1929), survived the 1898 counter-coup in exile, and in 1904 wrote the first monograph dedicated to the topic of the martial spirit as a cultural trait: Zhonggao zhi wushidao (China’s bushido). Liang exhorted his countrymen to rouse themselves and gives seventy examples of men from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods who exemplified the martial spirit. He reserves the highest praise for Zhao Wuling, who rallied resistance to northern incursions and even adopted ‘barbarian’ trousers as better suited to mounted warfare. The book was banned by Manchu censors, but published in his Yinbingshi heji (Collected works from the ice drinker’s studio).

Written explicitly as curricular material for the next generation of students, this work is a rebuttal to Western and Japanese characterizations of China as ‘a nation without military history and a people without the martial spirit. I am ashamed, angry, and cannot accept this’ [Liang 1904]. With the unification of the empire and imposition of autocratic rule, the martial spirit was discouraged, as it might pose a threat to the imperial power holders. This was a process begun with the Qin and continued by the Han. In his ‘Preface’, Liang sought to prove that the apparent lack of martial spirit was not an essential part of the Chinese people’s makeup, but gradually withered under despotic policies designed to foster a passive population.

Comparing the ancient state of Zhao to Sparta, he likened China’s Warring States period to a microcosm of modern international competition, periods that produced men of daring and ambition and punished complacency. Liang notes that although bushido was the code of the feudal samurai class, rather than becoming obsolete with the Meiji Restoration and Westernization, it actually diffused to all levels of society and formed the ‘soul’ of Japanese nationalism. Thus he attempted to resurrect role models of ancient martial spirit, while at the same time championing modernization and balancing the claims of individualism and patriotism [Liang 1904].

During his years of exile, Liang learned many lessons from Japan’s response to contact with the West. In a recollection published in the Qingyi bao, and collected in his Yinbingshi ziyoushu, Liang recounts a moving incident, where passing a Japanese military camp, he beheld a banner with the exhortation: ‘Pray to die in battle’. In a shock of realization, he compared this to the dread of conscription and the bitterness of military service reflected in so much Chinese poetry. Concluding that bushido was the ‘soul’ (hun) of Japan, he set about to discover the soul of China. In his Xinmin shuo (Essays on the new citizen), Chapter 17, ‘Shangwu’ (Revering the martial spirit), he cites the traditional Chinese aphorisms, ‘enduring a hundred insults is golden’ and ‘spit on the face eventually dries’, as unfit to serve China in a global struggle for survival. Denying the incompatibility of martial spirit and ‘civilisation’, he insists that civilizations are founded on the martial spirit and perish without it (Liang 1936). He mourned its loss in China like a death in the family.

Rejecting the traditional ideal of ‘universal peace’ (taiping) as too static, Kang Youwei (1858–1927), the elder statesman of the reform movement, attempted to synthesize Confucianism with a theory of progress; Liang Qichao adopted social Darwinism, earning the title ‘China’s Huxley’, Yan Fu championed Hegel’s view of history lurching from extreme to extreme, but always tending toward reason and freedom; and Tan Sitong believed that revolution required the ultimate sacrifice. Tan invoked the Buddhist doctrine of ‘uncreated and undestroyed’ to break down attachment, fear of death, and promote martyrdom as an aspect of the martial spirit. What we find here is a terrible optimism: violent disruption is the price of progress. The martial spirit required individual acts of sacrifice for the survival of the ‘race’, viewed in the nineteenth century in narrow essentialist terms. Would China merely exchange incompetent Manchu colonialism for the efficiency of Western colonialism?

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) said: ‘It is difficult to imagine Chinese men fighting a war. If they do have disagreements with one other, it is more like the petulance of women, or might come to hair pulling’ [Sheké 2010]. Diaries of Japanese veterans of what the Chinese call the ‘Nanjing Massacre’ (1937) marveled at the passivity of the population and wondered if they had a natural inclination toward submissiveness, or were simply enlightened about death. To counter this stereotype, late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century reformers cited passages from the ancients, like *The History of the Han*, ‘Annals of Geography’, which says: ‘The men of Wu and Yue are all warriors, and therefore they love the sword; they take death lightly and are easily aroused’ [Ban Gu]. They also noted contemporaneous examples like martial artists Huo Yuanjia and Wang Ziping, who defeated Western challengers in public matches.

The arrival of Western frigates, gunboats, and steamers in the nineteenth century was like an alien invasion. Adding insult to injury, Japan, junior partner in China’s own cultural sphere, not only resisted Western colonization, but even defeated China herself in the Sino-
Japanese War of 1894. Unlike the Japanese, who combined Western technology with emperor worship and Shinto, China’s nineteenth-century advocates of reviving the martial spirit rarely appealed to folk religion, and even Guan Yü, the God of War, or mythical civilization founder Yellow Emperor, never seemed to gain the cult status of Japan’s Amaterasu. Religious and ‘philosophical Daoism’, too, were dismissed as either too superstitious or too quietist. The Japanese synthesis of militarism and Shinto seemed not to resonate with the Chinese as much as the Western model of imperialism and Christian evangelism, and reformist intellectuals tried to rehabilitate elements of Confucianism, Moism and Buddhism to form a quasi-religious ideology as the basis of nascent nationalism.

In Japan, imperial incarnation, more powerful even than Europe’s divine right of kings, justified the divine nature of the emperor, the superiority of the Japanese race, and their destiny to rule over other peoples. Kamakazi volunteers exceeded available aircraft, and fallen soldiers were venerated in Shinto shrines. It was not lost on Chinese intellectuals that European knights were defenders of the faith, that Christian missionaries worked hand-in-glove with Western imperialism, and that Shinto was a part of Japanese militarism. Prussia and Japan both transformed themselves from peasant societies into industrial and military powerhouses with a militaristic ethos. Recognizing the roles of religion, racialism, science, industrialism and colonialism in the rise of Japan and the West, Chinese reformers debated the merits of constitutional monarchy versus republicanism and defensive versus expansionist military policies.

During the nineteenth century, the martial arts community was a hotbed of patriotism, but its loyalties were tested during the Taiping Rebellion’s attempt to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and the Boxer’s assault on all foreigners. Again, during the Warlord, Republican, and Communist eras, wanting to align their martial skills with the knight-errant ethic of aiding the oppressed, the martial arts community found themselves with few good choices. This was the dilemma that drove patriotic martial arts hero Chen Zizheng to drink and an untimely death. China’s defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894), resulting in the loss of Manchuria, Korea and Taiwan, Japan’s 1931 invasion of Manchuria, and 1937 attacks on Nanjing and Shanghai created a widespread consensus around the need for self-strengthening. The role of athletics, calisthenics and martial arts in Western and Japanese nations prompted a series of private and public efforts to infuse physical culture into the educational system. The half-century between the last days of the Manchu dynasty, he saw China’s humiliating defeat in WWI, only to be betrayed at the Versailles Conference, Lu Xun (1881-1936). Although promoters of the martial arts included President of the Republic Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and President of Beijing University Cai Yuanpei, literary giant and May Fourth New Culture Movement leader Lu Xun was skeptical. Born in 1881 during the last days of the Manchu dynasty, he saw China’s humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, the abortive Coup d’Etat of 1898, the Unequal Treaties and Spheres of Influence, the Boxer Rebellion, the Warlord Era, the Shanghai Massacre, the Nationalist-Communist Civil War and Japanese occupation of Manchuria. He died one year after the Communists’ Long March and one year before the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War.

Seeing a photograph of the public execution of a suspected Chinese spy by Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War, while a crowd of Chinese countrymen looked on apathetically, convinced Lu to abandon medicine and devote himself to curing China’s sick soul. Further, after contributing tens of thousands of Chinese laborers to the Allied cause in WWI, only to be betrayed at the Versailles Conference, Lu Xun wondered why China, with its hundreds of millions, could not muster
the ‘Spartan spirit’ of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartan soldiers held the pass against the massive Persian army. Lu’s assessment of the Chinese psyche closely parallels Nietzsche’s vision of the slave mentality of a sick society – kowtowing to the powerful and cruel.

Most of all, Lu Xun was fearful that his countrymen’s confidence in their ‘cultural superiority’ might lead them to dismiss Western military hardware as cheap tricks and fall prey to the kind of delusions that led the Boxer rebels to believe that their qigong practices made them bulletproof. In two opinion pieces written in 1918 and 1919, and published in Xin qingnian (New youth), Lu employed his biting sarcasm to expose the lies of Ma Liang, who created an alternate reality of a national character known as ‘New Martial Art’, considering it a ‘national treasure’ and superior to Western calisthenics and pugilism. Lu ridiculed the invented traditions and fantastic mythic origin stories of the many family styles and Ma Liang’s proposal that military officers wear swords denoting their rank in order to promote ‘martial virtue’ (wude) and ‘martial air’ (wufeng). He called the debate that erupted between traditional lineage stylists and modernizers ‘mere professional jealousy’, and ridiculed the passage on March 22, 1917 of a bill drafted by Wang Ne to ‘popularize China’s New Martial Art’. To those who claimed Chinese martial arts were ‘a perfectly good and perfectly beautiful form of physical education’ and ‘the means for strengthening the nation and saving the race’, he responded, ‘Maybe you knights-errant and brave warriors from Zhili and Shandong could dedicate your strength to…self-improvement and saving others and think of ways to help each other instead of ways to hurt each other’ [Lu 1918]. Thus, if Sun regarded martial arts as still relevant for physical culture and instilling the ‘martial spirit’, Lu regarded it as an embarrassing feudal relic, fraught with self-delusion and distraction. Interestingly, both men gave up medical careers for culture and politics. In the struggle to overthrow the dynasty, Sun cultivated allies in foreign powers, warlords, secret societies and the underworld, whereas Lu blamed their initial lack of success on not having a revolutionary party and relying on targeted assassinations of Manchu figures.

Although China has been more inclined to make heroes of its models of filial piety, as in the ‘Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety’, Chinese myth and folklore are not without their martial heroes. Lacking any analogue of ancient Greece’s Iliad and Odyssey, or India’s Mahabharta and Ramayana, the Chinese popular imagination, nevertheless, possesses a rich cast of martial heroes, drawn from historical records and vernacular fiction. The Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanyi), an example of mythologized history, is set in the century between the Yellow Turban Rebellion (184 CE) and the Jin Unification (266–420), and is rich in characters, plots and models of military strategy. It reached its present form during the late Yuan and early Ming. In the novel, Guan Yu (c. 160–220 CE) is a loyal general serving warlord Liu Bei during the end of the Eastern Han and beginning of the Three Kingdoms period. Among the three heroes of the narrative – Guan Yu, Liu Bei and Zhang Fei – Guan Yu is depicted with a red face, green cloak and tripartite beard, holding a hefty halberd. A ubiquitous figure of folklore and legend, he has been elevated to the status of God of War, and his iconic image adorns countless household, business and temple altars. His story is endlessly recycled in contemporary fiction, film, video games, and theme parks.

After four centuries of the Han dynasty, China once again fell into disunity during a period called the Six Dynasties, Three Kingdoms, Jin, and North South Dynasties. Straddling this transition from the last days of the Han to the beginning of the Three Kingdoms was Cao Zhi (192–232), son of Cao Cao, the founder of the Kingdom of Wei, who wrote a famous poem, ‘White Horse’ (Baima pian), signaling the revival and transformation of the martial spirit:

A white horse with a golden bridle
Gallops off to the Northwest.
May I inquire whose son is this?
Oh, a young knight-errant of Youzhou and Bingzhou.
Bidding farewell to hearth and home at a tender age,
He sought fame on distant battlefields.
A stout bow and deadly crossbow never left his hands,
And on his back a quiver of long and short arrows.
Drawing the bow, he hits the bulls-eye on the left,
And in the next instant, shreds the target on the right […]
Increasing alarms from the border towns,
As enemy forces press hard on the frontier.
With desperate dispatches arriving from the North,
Our young knight mounts his horse and rushes to the front.
He vows to crush the forces of the Xiongnu
And trample the rebellious Xianbei.
Risking his life on the point of a sword,
How can he worry about life and death?
He cannot afford to give a thought to his parents,
Much less wife and children.
His fame will live forever in the annals of mighty heroes,
As he turns his back on personal interests.
He sacrifices his life to protect the nation,
Seeing death as a homecoming.

This poem sounds all the themes of martial literature. Whether internecine warfare among the civilized states or invasion by ‘barbarian’ border peoples, the sons of Han are called upon to trade the personal for the patriotic, the comforts of home for the hardships of the campaign, and place loyalty to the nation above filial piety [Cao Zhi n.d.].

It would be another four centuries before China was once again unified under the Sui. During the long interregnum of disunity, there was fierce warfare between rival kingdoms and opportunistic attacks by border peoples. The tradition of ‘borderland poems’ continued and produced a plethora of works, sharing not only the themes of patriotism and hardship, but even the same generic title ‘Congjun xing’ (Marching with the army). Among these was Zhang Yan (444–505 CE) of the North Dynasties, Xiao Wang (503–551 CE), emperor of the Kingdom of Liang, and early Tang warrior-poet Wang Changling (598–756), who wrote: ‘Yellow sand, a hundred battles dressed in golden armor; if I do not destroy Loulan, I will not return home. [...] As long as the Flying General of Longcheng lives, we will never let the barbarian horses cross the Yin Mountains’ [Wang Changling n.d.]. Fellow warrior poets Li Ang, Li Bai, Yang Jiong and Chen Yu all wrote ‘Congjun xing’ poems during the Tang. On the cusp of the Song-Yuan transition, female poet Zhang Yuniang (b. 1250), also wrote a ‘Congjun xing’ poem, and her contemporary, Wen Tianxiang (1236–1283), refused to surrender to Mongol invaders with the words: ‘Death is inevitable, but if we die for the motherland, our memories live forever’ [Wen Tianxiang n.d.]. A thousand years later, Mao sounds the same sentiment, announcing his intention to join the revolution in a parting poem for his father: ‘Your son has determined to leave home and will not return until he makes a name for himself. Why should I be buried in the family graveyard, when I can make my home anywhere?’ [Mao 1968]. This is very much in the tradition of last will and testament poems, written by those who set off on perilous missions, a custom continued today by Chinese dissidents. Fame becomes a form of inheritable family capital, and thus can be made to serve the ideal of filial piety.

Turning now from the warriors to the knights-errant, the latter inhabit a gray area, outside of official state sponsorship, but often beloved in the popular imagination. Nathan Sivin has warned against using the term ‘Daoist’ as if it denoted an organized, homogeneous formation, and the same caveat applies in spades to the ‘knights-errant’. Discussions of the knights-errant invariably begin with a list of the several names in Chinese (youxia, wuxia, xiake, renxia), the unsatisfactory translations, and other disclaimers relating to the nebulous and slippery nature of this category. As we seek to de-essentialize these identities, we increasingly resort to a list of attitudes or behaviors, thus, sociologically, the ‘knights-errant’ might be swords-for-hire, ‘social bandits’, or simply a humble individual, compelled by conscience to take justice into their own hands. They are not confined to a specific historical period and do not constitute a special class. They are united by a spirit – a spirit of righteous indignation that can express itself on the private level as revenge for a personal wrong, on the local level in fighting corruption, or on the national level as patriotism, assassination, or rebellion.

As early as the 3rd century BCE, Legalist philosopher Han Fei classified the knights-errant as one of the ‘five vermin’ (wudu) and was baffled by the grassroots popularity of those who flouted the law in the name of justice. Second-century BCE historian Sima Qian and first-century CE historian Ban Gu both devote chapters to the role of the knight-errant in Chinese history. In his Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji), Sima Qian offers this sympathetic definition in ‘Biographies of Knights-errants’ [vol. 124, no. 64]:

Though their actions may not conform to perfect righteousness, yet they are always true to their word. What they undertake, they invariably fulfill; what they have promised, they invariably carry out. Without a thought for themselves, they hasten to the side of those in peril, heedless of their own safety. Yet they never boast of their accomplishments, considering it a disgrace to tout what they have done for others. [Sima 2006]

Whereas both historians acknowledged the knights-errant’s selflessness and courage, but had reservations about their heterodoxy, Sima concedes their righteous indignation, while Ban Gu warns of ‘using martial skills to violate social order’ [Ban 2007].

The knights-errant operated under a code of ‘reciprocity’ (bao), by which kindness was repaid with kindness (baonen) and injury with injury (baouchou). Whether unemployed peasants and artisans, déclassé nobles, or simply men of conscience, the knights-errant shared an ethical code of righteousness, loyalty, and honor, and occupy a mythical
space in Chinese folklore called the *jianghu* (rivers and lakes), not unlike our Sherwood Forest or Wild West. Although undertaken as private vigilante justice, these acts of retribution do not fundamentally threaten the social order, unless they provoke full-scale clan vendettas (*xiedou*). The murder of one’s father provides most of the recorded cases of justifiable revenge, highlighting the deontological dilemma of conflicting duties to family and state.

Late nineteenth-century revolutionary Tan Sitong attempted to revive the ideal of ‘righteous knights’ (*renxia*), with an emphasis on self-sacrifice in the spirit of Mozi. He modeled this in his own life, when following the abortive Coup of 1898, his co-conspirators fled abroad, while he remained to face execution as an example to his countrymen of what liberation required. With an arrest warrant out for him, he resolved the competing demands of filial piety and righteous self-sacrifice by forging a series of letters in his father’s hand urging his son to desist from political activity, and thus protecting the elder Tan, a high official, from any involvement in the plot [Tan 1998]. In thinking about filial piety and the martial spirit, readers should keep in mind the nature of the traditional extended family, where ‘growing up and leaving home’, or ‘starting your own family’ were unthinkable, and where collective punishment for crime could reach nine familial removes (*zhulian jiuzu*). Of course, ‘getting involved’, or playing the good Samaritan/knight in shining armor, runs directly counter to the tendency to ‘look on with folded arms’ (*xiushou pangguan*) for fear of ‘becoming implicated’ (*lianlei*).

The Tang dynasty is China’s golden age of poetry, and Li Bai is arguably China’s national poet. He grew up on the rugged Western frontier, and in a letter to a friend declared: ‘At fifteen, I was devoted to swordsmanship’. His poems frequently reference the sword and the wine cup, symbols of the knight-errant lifestyle: ‘I draw my sword and strike the water, but the water flows on. I lift my wine cup to dispel the sadness, but feel even sadder’. The word ‘sword’ appears 107 times over 106 of Li Bai’s poems, and he often boasts about how many men, and even tigers, he has killed. His poetry reveals a fascination with the figure of the knight-errant, and a famous line that every Chinese student can recite: ‘Killing an enemy every ten paces, he roams a thousand miles without opposition. When finished, he brushes off his clothes and departs, concealing his person and name.’ The poem references Xinlinjing, who during the final dramatic days of the Warring States period heeds the entreaty of the King of Zhao to save his country from Qin aggression. In an episode recorded in the *Shiji*, ‘Biography of Wei Gongzi’, the King of Zhao was reluctant to stand up to Qin, prompting Xinlinjing to take matters into his own hands. Using a stolen commander’s tally to gain access to the encampment, he killed the reluctant Wei commander and personally led the Wei troops to relieve the siege of Zhao. This is a classic example of an individual act of courage and ingenuity, even to the point of committing treason in answer to a higher calling. Whether the bold chest-beating of Su Shi’s, ‘We boldly ate the flesh of the barbarian invaders, and laughing drank their blood’, or the melancholy counterpoint, ‘We lie drunk on the desert battlefield, but there is no laughter; from ancient times, how many return safely from war’, these are a far cry from the stereotypical poetic themes of love, nature, beauty and nostalgia.

During the last days of the Ming dynasty, Huang Zongxi, a young nineteen-year-old scholar, avenged the murder of his father in a very public assassination of a member of the court eunuch faction. For this act of filiality and courage, he was pardoned by the emperor and lionized by the masses. Years later, he went on to lead the remnants of armed resistance to the Manchu takeover, and his son Baijia wrote the foundational work of the ‘Internal School’ (*neijia*), in which he praised contemporary lineage holder Wang Zhengnan as a ‘real knight-errant’: ‘Wang Zhengnan was a knight-errant, championing the oppressed and acting only in the cause of justice’ [Gu 1982].

Even more unconventional were the female knights-errant, the most famous of whom, Qiu Jin (1875-1907), saw her literary aspirations thwarted by arranged marriage, and ultimately became a vanguard feminist and anti-Manchu conspirator. During a tour of Japan, she was impressed with the military discipline displayed across all sectors of the society, and on her return to China, founded a feminist newspaper, writing under the pen name ‘Female Knight of Mirror Lake’, and established a school featuring military training to prepare cadre for an anti-Manchu uprising. She eventually joined the Tongmenghui, drafting the military code for their armed wing. Wearing men’s clothing, she participated in martial arts training at the school along with the male students, but a plot was uncovered, and she was summarily executed after refusing to reveal co-conspirators under torture. Her fictional doppelganger is Wen Kang’s Sister Thirteen (Shisanmei), a heroine who appears in his nineteenth-century collection *Tales of Heroes for Children* (Ernü yingxiong zhuhan). After the murder of her father, and failure to get justice from the corrupt legal system, she trains in the martial arts and avenges her father’s death with her own hands [Wen Kang n.d.]. These women warriors fight for family, country, justice and gender. However, even today, female folk heroes like Hua Mulan are viewed with a degree of ambivalence for their extrajudicial approach to seeking justice.

After two centuries of Manchu rule, compounded by Western and Japanese imperialism, progressive intellectuals sought inspiration for the spirit of resistance. The first generation of intellectuals who recognized the threat and attempted to rescue the Manchu regime were...
associated with the Self-Strengthening Movement. Zeng Guofan, one of the architects of the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion, in his famous ‘Encouragement to Study’ (Quanxue pian), appeals to his countrymen to emulate the spirit of the knights-errant, who ‘look lightly on worldly gain’, ‘sacrifice themselves to save the world’ and ‘value righteousness over life itself’. Finally, he says that when compared with the ‘way of the sages’, the way of the knights-errant differs only in method [Zeng 1984].

The next generation of patriots turned both against the Manchu regime and the new external threats. Xue Fucheng (1838-1894), lamented the carving up of China by foreign powers and called for ‘exceptional heroes’ to step forward [Xue 1898]. Tan Sitong credited the pacifying of Xiongnu tribes in ancient times to the knight-errant spirit. Kang Youwei declared that, ‘The people are complacent—gentlemen do not have the knight-errant spirit, and the common people’s hearts are weak’. He considered the knights-errant the true preservers of the Moist tradition [Kang 1988]. Zhang Taiyan (1869-1936) insisted that: ‘The knights-errant are very important at this time of national crisis’. In his ‘Geming zhi daode’ (Revolutionary ethics), he tried to make the case that the knight-errant tradition had its roots in the teachings of Confucius, which were corrupted by those who selfishly pursued personal profit, concluding that: ‘Without courage, one is not a complete human being’ [Zhang 1906].

Influenced by Nietzsche and Bergson, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) called for ‘guts, muscle, and mind’, seeing the knight-errant as an analog of the übermensch, and expressing admiration for Sparta and Germany’s promotion of the ‘martial spirit’, he insisted that this was not ‘physical strength but the power of the mind’. Tan Sitong’s Renxue, Tang Caichang’s ‘Xiake pian’ and Liang Qichao’s ‘Lun Shangwu’ all praised the Japanese samurai and attributed Japan’s rise to the spirit of righteous resistance. Tan and Liang sought to take the martial spirit of the xia, operating on the private and local level, and apply it as with Japan’s bushido to the creation of a new national ethos. Both Tan and Liang sought to rehabilitate Mozi and the knight-errant spirit of courage and righteousness, which was suppressed under the Confucian orthodoxy of the Eastern Han. After the failed coup d’etat of 1898, Huo Yuanjia retrieved the severed head of Dadao Wangwu, publicly displayed by Manchu officials as a warning against rebellion. Huo went on to found the Jingwu Association and earn the admiration of the leader of the Republican Revolution Sun Zhongshan.

The most famous novel reflecting the subculture of loveable outlaws is Water Margin (Shuihuzhuan), variously attributed to Shi Naian or Luo Guanzhong of the Ming, set in the late Song dynasty on the eve of the Mongol takeover [Shi 1997]. The plot, inspired by the leader of a 1121 rebellion, is a series of episodes involving righteous outlaws, working class heroes all, who are bound together by their common outrage at official corruption. Eventually numbering 108, including three women, they embody the virtues of loyalty and justice, and turning their wrath on local officials, they remain loyal to the emperor, whom they see as likewise the victim of venial court lackeys. This band of brothers was adopted by the Daoist folk religion, and the 108 were said to be incarnations of the 36 Heavenly Spirits and 72 Earthly Fiends, sent to earth by the goddess Xuan Nü to amass good karma by fighting for the people. After many heroic exploits, they are ultimately brought to heel by government forces and granted amnesty in exchange for fighting on behalf of the court.

Water Margin was tolerated during the Mongol dynasty for its negative image of the Song government, but banned during the Ming for its frank seduction scenes and sympathetic portrayal of sedition. The archetype of the righteous outlaw is as beloved in China as Robin Hood and the cowboy in American folklore, a free spirit who refuses to bow to injustice and possesses superior martial arts ability. Hobsbawm calls this archetype the ‘noble robber’, or ‘social bandit’.

Modern narratologists agree that what the knights-errant and righteous outlaws have in common is a personal history of suffering injustice, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, killing only in self-defence or revenge, support by the people, and ultimately falling victim to betrayal. It combines the topos of injustice with the archetype of the martial arts hero. Mao claimed to have been inspired by the Liangshan bandits during the War of Resistance against Japan, but in 1975, during the Cultural Revolution, criticized it for ending with capitulation to the ruling class. These role models of rebellion are inscribed in the popular imagination and can provide either escapist fantasies or inspiration to action.

By far the most perilous path to martial fame is that of the political assassin. Jing Ke’s failed attempt to assassinate the King of Qin during the Warring States period to protect his native state of Yan is the paradigmatic model of loyalty and daring. An anonymous poet, writing in the chuci style, immortalizes the would-be assassin: ‘Facing danger without regard for life, the body may be killed, but the soul will fly away’. From Chu Yu of the Spring and Autumn Period to Xu Xiling of the Republican era, history records countless assassination attempts to rid the nation of internal oppressors or external aggressors. Assassins act in the political arena, avenging the destruction of a state, while the knights-errant avenge private injustice and are often motivated by filial piety or loyalty to a supportive patron. By the nineteenth century, and still under Manchu rule, Chinese revolutionaries like Yang Dusheng
were inspired by the writings of anarchist Bakunin to make an attempt on the life of the Dowager Empress and Rasputin-like court eunuch Rong Lu. In Han historian Sima Qian’s view, what unites the knights-errant and assassins is their willingness to use violence in the cause of justice. He compares them favorably to the Daoist recluses, who, he says, selfishly preserve their own purity by withdrawing from society but are of no benefit to their fellow men.

For sheer swashbuckling appeal, the knights-errant are rivaled only by the famed Shaolin fighting monks. Although they share the reputation of using their martial prowess to benefit the oppressed, the knights-errant are too diffuse to be associated with a branded martial style, whereas at least since Huang Baji’s famous Neijia quanjia, Shaolin gongfu has been associated with the hard style, or ‘external school’, of Chinese martial arts. The Indian (by some accounts Persian) fifth-sixth century Buddhist monk Bodhidharma is credited by legend with introducing both Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China and the martial arts, which he taught his disciples as an antidote to somnolence during protracted meditation. Modern historians, beginning with Tang Hao in the 1930’s, consider the story of Bodhidharma’s presence at the Shaolin Temple a Ming invention, and the Yijinjing, attributed to him, a Ming forgery. Once credited with suppression of Japanese pirates (wokou) in the sixteenth century, the Shaolin monks are now understood to have been part of a multiethnic alliance of Japanese, Korean, and native Chinese forces.

Still, it is reasonable to assume that the monks developed martial skills for the defence of the temple, hired out as mercenaries for imperial patrons, venerated violent Buddhist deities, and saw a link between self-discipline in the martial arts and meditation. Although history records Shaolin support for Li Shimin, future founder of the Tang dynasty, and his granting of imperial patronage, there is no mention that they fought with anything but conventional military techniques. Alternating between patronage and persecution under different reigns, the Shaolin monks have become fixtures of China’s intangible cultural heritage and international icons.

If the warriors, knights-errant, outlaws, assassins and fighting monks disrupt the social order, it is worth revisiting the conventional norms to which they are the cultural counterpoint. These may be summarized as: filial piety (xiao), that binds one to hearth and home and care of the elderly; fate (ming), that fosters acceptance of one’s lot; reincarnation (lunhui), that promises a higher rung with the next birth, and partible inheritance (fenjia), that guarantees an equal share to all male heirs. All of these tend to cement the status quo and prevent the individual from going rogue and taking risks. The ‘Twenty-four Paragons of Filial Piety’ vividly illustrate the centripetal force of the Chinese family, with homely examples like the filial son who bares his own flesh to distract mosquitoes from tormenting his father, or the one who tastes his ill father’s stool as a diagnostic test. Many of these stories involve extreme physical tests, no less than those required of warriors. Male primogeniture was abandoned after the Qin and Han, replaced by partible inheritance, which meant that there were no junior sons seeking their fortunes far from home, unless, of course, it was through examination success and official appointment.

Finally, the trickster is perhaps the most beloved antihero in Chinese folklore and literature, satisfying some adolescent longing in the collective unconscious for unapologetic transgression. Sun Wukong, the magical, mischievous monkey in The Journey to the West (Xiyouji) steals the show from the putative protagonist, the Tang monk Xuan Zang, much like his prototype Hanuman in the Ramayana [Huang, ed. 2013]. Attributed to Wu Chengen in the sixteenth century, it chronicles the famous pilgrimage of Xuan Zang through Central Asia and India in search of Buddhist sutras. Mixing history and fantasy, human and fabulous characters, terrestrial and celestial geography, it is a veritable encyclopedia of Chinese folklore and religion. The Monkey King Sun Wukong is a binary buster – a monkey-man chimera, subhuman and superhuman, bestial and divine, a creature of unrestrained ego and id, with omnipotent magical powers. His encounters with various mythical authority figures – the Jade Emperor of Heaven, Laozi, Queen Mother of the West, Dragon King of the East Sea, or the Buddha himself – set the stage for comedic chaos and result in appeasement of the incorrigible trickster by conferring ever more dazzling magical powers. After acquiring immortality, invulnerability, metamorphosis, clairvoyance, teleportation, and an arsenal of invincible weapons, he is given the assignment of accompanying Xuan Zang on his sutra-seeking mission. Sun’s status as a fantasy creature gives him license to thumb his nose at authority and expose the hypocrisy and sanctimoniousness of those in power. The trickster represents that aspect of the martial spirit that longs for super powers to rebel against all restraints, transgressing and transcending the laws of nature and of man.

As history morphs into legend, and legend gives rise to archetypes, these folk heroes become timeless touchstones of inspiration for the masses. Looking at the warriors, knights-errant, outlaws, assassins and tricksters as figures on what narratologists call ‘the hero’s journey’, they step outside of conventional social roles, much like the Buddhist monk or Daoist recluse, but provide the yang to their yin.
THE MARTIAL SPIRIT TODAY

Contemporary exponents of reviving the martial spirit must walk a fine line between seeming to glorify war and acknowledging that revolution has seldom been accomplished without violence. The ‘century of humiliation’ was deeply traumatic and occasioned much soul-searching. A mixture of self-doubt and ‘never again’ was etched into the national psyche. From the seventeenth-century Japanese pirates, to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, to the Russo-Japanese War, to the Japanese invasions of 1931 and 1937, the Chinese developed a very ambivalent attitude towards their island neighbors. They reviled them with all manner of pejoratives but admired their boldness, indomitable spirit, and competitiveness.

Many Chinese intellectuals internalized the racist views of their foreign occupiers, a tendency which has not altogether disappeared today. A recent anonymous editorial on the Yun Wushu blog, entitled ‘China Lacks the Martial Spirit’, reflects this perspective. It claims that, like animals, some ‘races’ are carnivores and some are herbivores, some are expansionist and some are isolationist, and that only constant warfare preserves the martial spirit. ‘Aggression’, according to this writer, is a positive virtue and is despised only by inferior races, who do not possess the ‘aggressor gene’. He distinguishes between nations that excel at exploiting each other internally and cannot wait to emigrate, but are helpless when attacked from outside, and nations that are civil and democratic at home, but prey on weaker nations [Anon n.d.]. A recent study shows that the vital capacity of Chinese youth is only 60% of their Korean counterparts, linking this to the inclusion of taekwondo in the Korean public school physical education curriculum, and adding insult to injury, many Chinese parents’ only association with martial arts is taekwondo. Paradoxically, at the same time, Korean influence, through K-pop culture, is also blamed for the feminization of Chinese teens and compounding the ‘little emperor syndrome’ with a full scale ‘masculinity crisis’. This, in turn, manifests as an alarming physical examination failure rate for military recruits, which poses a national ‘security threat’. All of this reveals a deep anxiety about constructions of masculinity (nanzi qigai, yanggang zhi qi), martial spirit and national security.

Ironically, even as both Communists and the KMT were promoting the martial spirit, they also condemned wuxia novels and films as frivolous, if not outright subversive. Their resurgence in the 1980’s and 90’s, under more liberal policies, has more than made up for lost time to become the most popular genre in all media, and authors like Jin Yong are revered as national treasures. Now, like martial arts themselves, gongfu literature and films are considered an intangible cultural heritage that is a source of nationalistic pride. Should the enduring popularity of the wuxia genre be viewed as an expression of the martial spirit, or simply an innocent escape from the pressures of the college entrance exams (gaokao)? Might it also be seen as the kind of folk arts revival that often accompanies modernization, comparable to similar revivals in folk music and ethnic dance? If modernization tends to produce one global homogenized culture, folk revivals preserve unique heritage and identity. They also stir the pot from the bottom and allow arts from the grassroots to enter the mainstream.

Martial arts training is almost always framed as a solo endeavor, but martial skills and the martial spirit are almost always applied in the real world in collective military groups, where troop morale, unit cohesion, and esprit de corps are decisive. This will be equally true on both sides in international or internal armed conflicts. Adrenalin is addictive, and many undergo on the battlefield the kind of ‘peak experience’, or ‘flow’, that makes civilian jobs and domestic life seem boring. The same can be said for young people participating in demonstrations and protests, especially when they turn violent. Additionally, fatalities create a kind of ‘an eye for an eye’ momentum and the feeling that sacrifices are an investment that can only be redeemed by victory.

Building on the work of Le Bon, Freud recognized mass psychology as substituting egocentric perfectionism with the common cause of the group, directing libido towards an idealized leader and eliciting a sense of amplified power, safety in numbers, and release of repressed instincts [Freud 1921]. From Tiananmen to Hong Kong, Xinjiang to Tibet, pro-democracy and separatist movements still rely on the martial spirit of resistance. Whether resorting to firebombs or self-immolation, today’s protestors increasingly appropriate the language of earlier struggles, and street banners are once again emblazoned with the words ‘liberation’ and ‘revolution’. In a new twist, however, the ghost of Bruce Lee has been revived as a spiritual leader for Hong Kong protestors: his image and quotations appear on banners and T-shirts, and his pugilistic strategy of ‘be like water’ has been adopted as the theoretical principle guiding their fluid, hit-and-run tactics.
CONCLUSION

MEANING AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

Martial arts are practiced in China and the West against fundamentally different historical experiences and symbolic backgrounds. As we have seen, martial arts are promoted in China as compensation for the ‘Sick Man of Asia’ stereotype and the self-image of passivity and non-resistance. By contrast, Western students of martial arts are more likely to cite concern for personal safety than ethnic identity or national security. America’s struggle for decolonization and democracy, from the Boston Tea Party of 1763 to the Treaty of Paris of 1773, is a mere decade, compared to China’s centuries of rule by foreign masters. We see the martial spirit in individualistic or subcultural terms, but we do not carry the weight of centuries of colonization on our backs.

The Art of War says, ‘When the troops are full of spirit, they fight; when the spirit is exhausted, they run’. Appraising the outcome of the Korean War, in which China faced America troops, Chairman Mao said, ‘The Americans had much iron and little spirit; we had little iron and much spirit’ [Zhang 1995]. This highlights an ironic role reversal: the former ‘Sick Man of Asia’, just months after the triumph of its second revolution, finds itself flush with confidence and enjoying the psychological high ground on the battlefield against a superpower. Is this a Marxist version of the Confucian emphasis on the moral over the martial, or Ah Q’s proclaiming ‘spiritual victory’?

The martial spirit is a psycho-somatic complex: on the somatic side, it is strength, stamina and skill, and on the psychological side, it is something to die for. The individual may put his life on the line to save face, but in traditional China, the extended family and clan village were synonymous with identity and a strong disincentive to risk life and limb for abstract ideals, imperial ambitions, or even defence of the motherland. As the proverb says: ‘Heaven is high, and the emperor is far away’. Nationalism as practiced by modern industrial societies had it is strength, stamina and skill, and on the psychological side, it is something to die for. The individual may put his life on the line to save face, but in traditional China, the extended family and clan village were synonymous with identity and a strong disincentive to risk life and limb for abstract ideals, imperial ambitions, or even defence of the motherland. As the proverb says: ‘Heaven is high, and the emperor is far away’. Nationalism as practiced by modern industrial societies had

China’s ‘four great inventions’ – the compass, gunpowder, moveable type, and paper – were adopted by Europe to propel unprecedented expansionist policies, resulting in the far-flung empires of Britain, Spain, France, and Germany. Even tiny countries, like Portugal and Holland, reached across the globe to conquer and colonize vast territories. China, however, did not exploit the Silk Road, connecting the Far East to the Mediterranean, nor the fifteenth-century seafaring voyages of Zheng He to create uncontiguous colonies. It was not a lack of technology but martial zeitgeist that kept China inward-looking. Japan, by contrast, with far fewer resources, but possessing the ‘martial spirit’, took on the task of liberating all of Asia from Western imperialism, striking as far West as India and as far East as Hawaii. In spite of its periodic neglect of the martial spirit, China today occupies roughly the same footprint as the Manchu Empire, including the territory of its former conquerors, Mongolia and Manchuria, whereas after the fall of the Roman and Holy Roman Empires, and notwithstanding Napoleon, Hitler and the European Union, Europe never again achieved lasting political unity.

China’s geo-political reality is that it is ringed with former conquerors, separatists, marriages of convenience, and allies of the West, while the US shares borders with Canada and Mexico. Many Chinese feel that democracy equals ‘chaos’ (luan), and if government delivers prosperity and stability, that constitutes tacit ‘mandate’. We accuse China of waging chemical warfare against the West by manufacturing and smuggling opioids, conveniently forgetting the two Opium Wars the West fought with China to secure the right to sell opium to their population. We are offended by China’s ‘theft’ of intellectual property arts, assuring Americans a steady diet of vicarious and participatory violence. In all categories of violent crime, the US leads China by a very wide margin, meaning that the average American citizen has a much higher probability of looking down the barrel of a gun. The US comprises 5% of the world’s population but owns half the world’s guns, and boasts a quarter of the world’s prison population. Domestic violence, kidnapping, drug addiction, organized crime, home invasion, rape, homelessness, domestic terrorism, ideological militias, and high rates of violence against racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities all contribute to a pervasive paranoia and sense of personal insecurity. Differences in the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity also give rise to different expectations. Westerners are more likely to pursue Asian martial arts as a strategic cultural appropriation, but certainly not out of nativist pride and cultural preservation. For both, the pursuit of health and fellowship may be considered a constant; for Chinese and Western women, self-defence is a shared priority, and all of this plays out against the background of mammalian territoriality and competition for alpha male dominance.
and ‘unfair’ trade practices, forgetting the ‘Unequal Treaties’ imposed on China in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Are old Chinese martial arts masters who teach their ‘secrets’ to foreigners selling ‘intellectual property’? Are Western students of Asian martial arts guilty of ‘cultural appropriation’? Western popular opinion tends to sympathize with separatist movements in China, forgetting that we fought a Civil War to suppress separatism in our own country. We are short on historical memory and long on hypocrisy, but in much of the world, the martial spirit is fueled by historical memory and revenge for past wrongs.

A veritable kaleidoscope of conflicting attitudes towards the martial spirit is reflected in the proverb, ‘Good men do not join the army’, Mao’s ‘Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun’ and Xi Jinping’s, ‘Chinese martial arts are a unique cultural practice and a trademark of Chinese culture’. Hosting a state visit by Vladimir Putin, Xi confessed a childhood admiration for martial heroes Yue Fei and Qi Jiguang and a lifelong love of sports and martial arts. Speaking at the opening ceremonies of sporting events, Xi never misses an opportunity to express his personal fondness for martial arts and link them to realization of ‘the Chinese dream’ [Xi 2019].

The waxing and waning of the martial spirit closely tracks the threat of external invasion and internal rebellion, and most often resurfaces as remedy rather than preventive. In a 2019 New Year’s address to the nation, Xi Jinping warned China not to relax ‘disaster consciousness, crisis consciousness, and war-making consciousness’, and to maintain the option of reuniting Taiwan with force. Once again, the martial spirit is invoked in the sacred task of unifying the empire under China’s rightful role as the ‘Central Kingdom’. The peasant hates to put down the plow; the scholar hates to put down the pen; and filial sons of all classes hate to leave home. Thus the martial spirit is rarely seen as an intrinsic good in Chinese culture, but rather a necessary evil, serving the higher ideals of loyalty, justice and patriotism. The martial spirit—a trait always found deficient in friends, always excessive in enemies.
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